

the mindfulness bell

Autumn 2014

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Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth

By Thich Nhat Hanh

Interview with Charles Eisenstein

By Sister Jewel

Responding to Climate Change:

*Dinner Makes a
Difference*

Earth Holding Practices

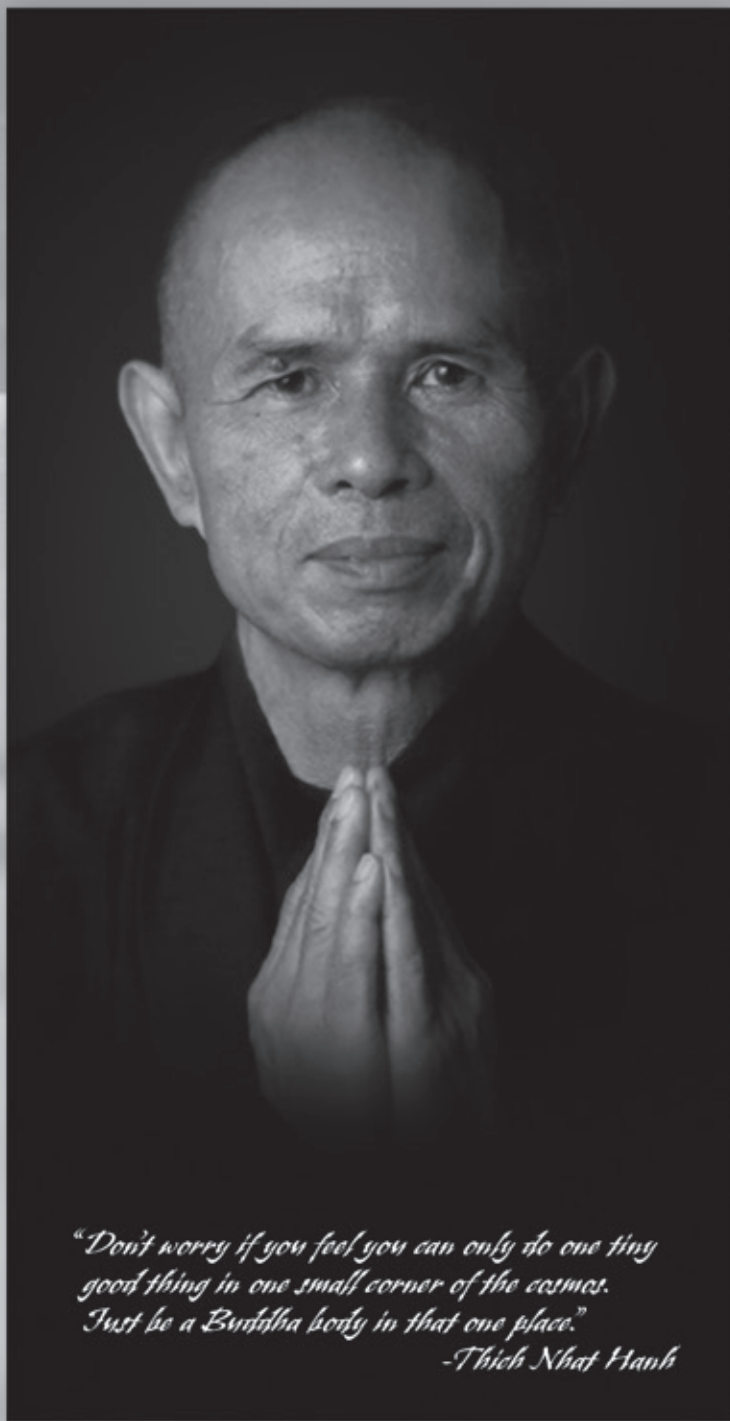
Forest of Interbeing

Spirit in Our Struggles

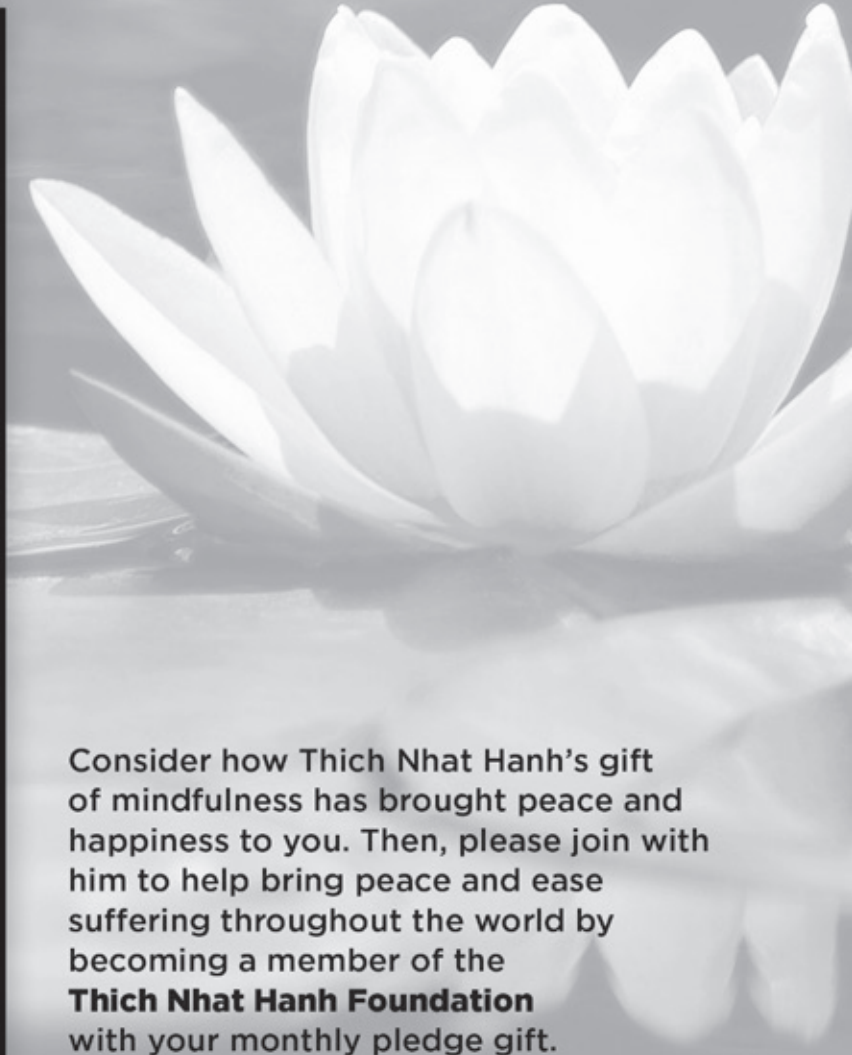
*Guest edited by Sister Jewel
and Brother Phap Ho*



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-Thich Nhat Hanh*



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the mindfulness bell

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in the Tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh
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Dear Thay, dear Sangha,

My heartfelt thanks to Sister Jewel and Brother Phap Ho for serving as guest editors for this issue on climate change and for sharing wonderful insights in the editorials below. It has been a deeply nourishing and joyful collaboration.

– Natascha Bruckner,
True Ocean of Jewels



Dear Thay, dear Sangha,

I am deeply grateful for the invitation to join in the crafting of this issue as guest editor. Engaging with all the contributions has helped me “use my Sangha eyes” to see and understand climate change from many different angles, and in processing all the diverse insights, to even use my “Sangha stomach” as we digest and integrate together a clearer purpose and direction for our lives in response to our global crisis. All the articles inspired me with the vast variety of ways we can intelligently, compassionately, and joyfully reduce the Earth’s suffering. One author has committed to planting one tree each year for the rest of his life. Several articles detail how, as practitioners and as Sanghas, we can bring mindfulness into our activism, and others show us how we can bring our engagement with society into our mindfulness practice, including what we choose to eat for dinner. From stories of reverent, nonviolent birth practices to allowing sisterhood and brotherhood to be the foundation of our social activism, from planting a rainforest in Mexico to starting a residential mindfulness community in the UK, we hear in each author the echo of a sentence in Thay’s Dharma talk here, “Love is fulfilling.” And it is this fulfillment that gives us energy, creativity, and courage to go forward, even if we cannot know the final outcome of our actions.

We are delighted by the wide range of contributors and perspectives, and we think you will appreciate the diversity of voices: children, young Wake Up practitioners, folks from Sanghas in Africa, people of color, monastics, practitioners from other traditions, as well as writers and thinkers working outside of a Buddhist framework. Their unique efforts unite us all in creating a new story of oneness, wholeness, sustainability, and ease, for us, all species, and our beloved Mother Earth.

May this offering help heal and preserve our precious planet.

– Sister Jewel (*Chan Chau Nghiem*)



I try to frame my practice and engagement in Earth Holding practice and climate change issues as a great opportunity and catalyst to grow understanding and love. We don’t have the time and luxury to play with our little toys in our small and separated world anymore. Actually this does not make us very happy anyway. We are invited by the suffering caused by humans to the Earth, our ecosystem, and many living beings, to wake up and to come together. I also clearly recognize that climate change issues are deeply connected with peace and social justice issues; interbeing can be seen everywhere. The easy part of this practice is to recognize the ignorant and greedy behaviors of humanity. A more challenging aspect is to stay open to our deep emotional response to our situation and open to love and acceptance. For me it is also too late to judge and blame politicians, CEOs, or bankers for our predicament. I feel no

Letters

Another year has passed and once again I am offered another year of *the Mindfulness Bell*. In gratitude I will accept your offer with the promise to share *the Mindfulness Bell* with our Sangha. We currently have about ten members of our Sangha and we all are grateful for the wisdom and insight that is available in every issue of your magazine. Thank you and everyone who supports *the Mindfulness Bell* and makes it available for people who need the healing effect of the Dharma. Your compassion is changing lives!

Humbly yours,

Patrick Lee Shuyter

*Lake Correctional Institution
Florida*

Dear Friends,

Many thanks for all the work that all of you do to make *the Mindfulness Bell* such a wonderful publication. I smile reading it, as it reminds me that I'm a part of a large Dharma Sharing Family and there are numerous ways to learn from and incorporate the practice.

*Peace in every moment,
Wendy Warburton*

Errata

In the Summer 2014 issue (#66), in Jeff Nielsen's article, "Reversing the Legacy of War: A Veteran's Story," Dharma teacher Patricia Hunt-Perry was incorrectly named Helen Hunt-Perry.

energy behind taking sides in partisan conflicts. The inspiration and energy for me comes from the potential to help our society and our world transform into a more just, loving, and sustainable one. This path can be scary, though, because we are not confident that we know how to be the change we want to see. We also do not know if there is a realistic chance to help a collective awakening take place. Moment to moment, do we have a choice? Where is our deep aspiration and love leading us? Can we not hear the calling of love and understanding from deep in our heart, inviting us to be an instrument of healing in this troubled time? Being part of the editorial team for this issue has been an expression of staying on the path, of learning and growing as a Sangha. To hear the different stories from our widespread Sangha and beyond offers me a clear and solid source of refuge. I am looking forward to continuing our journey together in the spirit of "I have arrived, I am home."

— Brother Phap Ho

photo by Jitka Slamova



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Healing Ourselves, Healing the Earth

By Thich Nhat Hanh

March 18, 2012

Plum Village

There is a big vacuum inside of us, so we look for things outside us to fill up the vacuum. We think that new and exciting things will work, but they do not seem to have an effect.

Good morning, dear Sangha. Today is Sunday, March the 18th in the year 2012, and we are in the Upper Hamlet beginning our spring retreat. It is very nice to hear the sound of the rain.

Many of us know that eternity can be touched in this present moment and the cosmos can be seen in the palm of our hand. But we need some mindfulness and concentration to do this. When you practice the Ten Mindful Movements,¹ you can touch eternity with every movement. If you are truly mindful, if you are truly concentrated, if you are able to release the notion of self, you are no longer this tiny body. You are the whole cosmos. Your tiny body contains the whole cosmos in it. All the generations of the past and the future are there in your tiny body and if you have that insight, it is easy to touch eternity in the present moment. When you breathe in mindfully with concentration, you can touch eternity. When you make a step mindfully with concentration, you can touch eternity and infinity.

We have received a number of questions concerning global ecological collapse from a magazine in London. Today we will try to answer some of them. Each question requires one in-breath and one out-breath, to be received.

1. Do you believe humans can avoid a global ecological collapse, or are we driving ourselves towards one?
2. The urban population across the world is growing. What, if anything, is lost by our increasing switch towards being an urban species?
3. Are we a vulnerable species or one still in control of our destiny?
4. There is strong support for engineered solutions to our ecological problems, for example, reflecting the sun's rays, sucking up carbon emissions, or lab-grown meat. Is this the right approach for us to be taking?
5. Most of us in the West are still attached to a high-consumption lifestyle. We like to buy new and exciting things. Is there a strong enough alternative lifestyle out there that can convince us to leave this high-consumption lifestyle behind?

6. Have we found a new narrative, one that can help us learn to live more sustainably before it is too late?
7. What is the hardest part of the lifestyle you have chosen to lead, and how do you attract young people to follow?
8. Can we strive for financial and spiritual contentment, or are they mutually exclusive? Can we be at the same time rich and spiritual?
9. Most environmentalists narrow down the problems we face to two issues: overconsumption and overpopulation. Where do you stand?

We Are the Earth

I think that we should try to answer the first and the third questions because they are connected. 1. Do you believe humans can avoid a global ecological collapse, or are we driving ourselves towards one? 3. Are we a vulnerable species or one still in control of our destiny?

The National Wildlife Federation tells us that every day about one hundred plant and animal species are lost to deforestation. Extinction of species is taking place every day. In one year, there may be 200,000 species going into extinction. That is not a problem of the future; it's going on now. We know that over 250 million years ago, there was global warming caused by gigantic volcanic eruptions. They caused the worst mass extinction in the history of the planet. At that time, there was a six-degree-centigrade increase in the global temperature. It was enough to kill up to ninety-five percent of the species that were alive on Earth. And now another global warming is taking place—this time, because of deforestation and industrialization, man-made. And maybe in one hundred years, there will be no more humans on the planet. Just one hundred years.

After the disappearance of ninety-five percent of species on Earth caused by that mass extinction, the Earth took one hundred million years to restore life as we see it now. If our civilization disappears, it will take that long for another civilization to reappear.

When volcanic eruptions happened, the carbon dioxide buildup created the greenhouse effect. That was more than 250 million years ago, and now the building up of carbon dioxide is coming from our own lifestyle and our industrial activities. And if a six-degree-centigrade increase takes place, ninety-five percent of the species on Earth will die out, including *Homo sapiens*. That is why we have to learn how to touch eternity with our in-breath and out-breath.

So mass extinctions of species have happened five times and the current one is the sixth. But according to Buddhist teaching, there is no birth and no death. After extinction, things will reappear in other forms. So we have to breathe very deeply to acknowledge the fact that we humans may disappear in just one hundred years. We have to learn to accept that hard fact. We should not be overwhelmed by despair. The solution is to learn how to touch eternity in the present moment.

We have been talking about the environment as something different from us, but we are the environment. The non-human elements are our environments and we are the environment of non-human elements. So we are one with the environment, we are the environment, we are the Earth. The Earth has the capacity to restore balance. Sometimes many, many species have to disappear in order for the balance to be restored.

The second question: The urban population across the world is growing. What is lost by our increasing switch towards being an urban species?

Life in the cities and life in the countryside are connected because we have to feed the cities. That is why the countryside has to change. The countryside is being contaminated by many things. The countryside has to use a lot of antibiotics, poisons, and insecticides to provide the cities with food. So the countryside is no longer safe for us. Even if we all returned to the countryside and continued that level of consumption, it is not a solution. Whether in the city or in the countryside, we are losing a lot. In the countryside we have more chances to touch nature. It is a little bit easier to heal ourselves with the practice of Touching the Earth in the countryside. But the countryside is also losing itself for the sake of the cities.

Transforming Our Lifestyle

The fourth question: There is strong support for engineered solutions to our ecological problems, like reflecting sunrays, sucking up carbon emissions, or lab-grown meat. Is this the right approach for us to be taking?

That may help, but it is not enough. What we need is a transformation of our consciousness, our idea of happiness, our lifestyle. And this is linked to the fifth question: Most of us in the West are still attached to a high-consumption lifestyle. In Asian countries, people are doing very much the same thing. We like to buy new and exciting things. Is there a strong enough

alternative lifestyle out there that can convince us to leave this high-consumption lifestyle behind?

We are seeking happiness, but there is suffering inside of us. We are getting sick. We don't feel at peace with ourselves. There is a big vacuum inside of us, so we look for things outside us to fill up the vacuum. We think that new and exciting things will work, but they do not seem to have an effect. We are consuming more and more, but we do not feel fulfillment. We need love, we need peace, but we do not know how to create love and peace. We know there must be a lifestyle that will create love and joy, but unless we know how to create that kind of life, we will continue to buy things.

Suppose you know how to enjoy walking meditation. With some training, you know how to bring your mind back to your body so that your mind and your body are together. When your mind and body are together, you are truly there. You can recognize that the rain is wonderful, the trees are beautiful, the air is fresh, and you can enjoy breathing in, breathing out, and touch the wonders of life in this present moment. In fact, if we bring our mind home to our body, if we know how to stop our thinking, then we will be established in the present moment. We are mindful of our body, we are mindful of what is going on in our body and around us, and we are in a situation to touch the wonders of life that are available in the here and the now. We are able to see that there are a lot of wonders in our body, in our mind. And when we reach out to the environment, we see that there are so many wonders also. This present moment is full of wonders. Because you don't know how to touch these wonders, you don't know how to appreciate life, to appreciate what is there. So you look for something that you think will make you happy.

Suppose we learn about the Five Mindfulness Trainings.² The Five Mindfulness Trainings is a kind of lifestyle that is born from a vision called interbeing. Everything is connected to everything else. Your happiness and the happiness of other species inter-are. If you are healthy, if you are happy, then other forms of life can profit from you. If you are sick, if you suffer, then other species will have to suffer with you. That insight of interbeing helps you see that you are linked to everything else. To protect yourself, you have to protect nature and every other species. That insight of interbeing will help you to remove discrimination, fear, anger, and make you feel better in yourself. The Five Mindfulness Trainings help us to train in how to protect life.

Protecting Life

The first training is about protecting life. Your life and the lives of other species are interrelated, and when you try to protect the lives of other species, you protect your own life. In order to protect ourselves, we have to protect others and that is the practice of the First Mindfulness Training.

When you breathe in mindfully, you can see that Mother Earth is in you, and you are in Mother Earth. And that kind of insight

helps you to remove your fear of dying. It helps you to see that to protect yourself, you have to protect Mother Earth. Protecting Mother Earth is to protect yourself. Protecting other species is protecting oneself. This is very clear. That is the first of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

If you think you are intelligent enough as a species, then you may be able to use your talent, your technologies, your love, your insight to protect the lives of other species. And even if you are the youngest species on Earth, you can play the role of an elder brother, an elder sister, and try to look out for the well-being of other species. This is a very beautiful thing to do. And that is what Mother Earth is expecting you to do as a species on earth, the *Homo sapiens*. Protecting life is a joy. That is a kind of lifestyle that comes from the insight of interbeing.

You are not doing it for yourself, because life is one. Life cannot be chopped into several pieces. To live in such a way that helps you to protect life can bring you a lot of joy because that is love itself. And when you have love in yourself, you don't have to run and buy things, because love is fulfilling. Love makes you peaceful and happy.

Generating True Love and True Happiness

The Third Mindfulness Training is about cultivating true love. We have to learn how to generate the energy of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and inclusiveness. This is the art of loving. If you are busy, if you only think of consuming, how do you have the time to love?

We learn from the Third Mindfulness Training that sexual desire and love are two different things. Love can only build, heal, rebuild, heal. We have to learn how to love ourselves. We have to learn how to take care of our body, to release the tension in our body, to reduce the pain in our body. There are very concrete ways to do it. You know how to practice touching the Earth by walking meditation, by lying down, allowing nature to heal you. You know how to release the tension in your body, to reduce the pain in your body, not to work your body too hard. All these things we can do. But if you are so busy making money in order to buy things, how do you have time to do so?

There are those of us who know how to organize our life in such a way that we have enough time to love, to take care of ourselves, and to take care of others around us. Every time you understand the suffering in yourself and in the other person, you allow the energy of compassion to arise in you. Every time we look deeply into the nature of suffering and see the causes of that suffering, compassion will be born in us as a kind of energy, whether that suffering is in us or in the other person. So getting in touch with suffering and allowing the energy



photo by Valerie O'Sullivan

Your happiness and the happiness of other species inter-are. If you are healthy, if you are happy, then other forms of life can profit from you. If you are sick, if you suffer, then other species will have to suffer with you.

of compassion to arise is something that we can do, provided that we are not so busy making money and buying things.

The energy of compassion can heal us and heal the other person and heal the Earth. Learning how to generate a feeling of joy, of happiness by touching the wonders of life, generating compassion by touching suffering, understanding suffering, are things all of us can do that belong to the kind of lifestyle that can heal ourselves and heal the Earth. The third training is about true love and this is possible if we have the time to practice as a group of people, a Sangha.

The Second Mindfulness Training is about true happiness. We realize that happiness cannot be possible with only making money and buying things. We should know how to generate and create true happiness. This training proves that true happiness is possible. We should stop running after fame, power, wealth, and sensual pleasures. We should recognize the wonders of life that are available in the present moment. We should be able to help ourselves and other people suffer less. These are concrete things to do as part of the lifestyle we are looking for.

Restoring Communication

The Fourth Mindfulness Training is about how to restore communication between father and son, father and daughter, mother and son, mother and daughter, partner and partner, brother and brother, brother and sister, and so on. If we cannot communicate, we suffer. Very often we cannot communicate with our own self. You don't like yourself, you hate yourself, you don't know how to listen to yourself, you don't know how to help yourself. So the practice of loving speech and deep listening should be also directed to ourselves. We have to learn to listen to the deepest desire in ourselves, to listen to the suffering in ourselves in order to understand. When we have understood our suffering and our deepest aspiration, we will be able to listen and to understand the aspiration and the suffering of the other person. This is something we can do. This is the object of the Fourth Mindfulness Training.

We are deeply divided as a society. We are trying to kill each other and the killing is taking place everywhere. We have a lot of fear, anger, discrimination, and despair because there is not enough communication between members of our species. We are not only killing other species, we are killing ourselves as a species. That is why technology is not enough. We have to learn how to listen, how to speak lovingly.

We know that in five or six days, our practice in a retreat can help us to know how to listen to the suffering in us and in the other person and how to understand. When the energy of compassion is born, we'll be able to listen with compassion and to use loving speech and restore communication. Every one of us can do that. This always happens in our retreats and this is part of the lifestyle you are looking for. This is a noble style of living and you don't need to be a Buddhist in order to adopt this kind of lifestyle.

Mindful Consumption

The Fifth Mindfulness Training is about nourishment and healing. All of us need nourishment and healing. Most of us are sick. We don't know how to go back to nature and get healing. We don't know how to generate the energy of compassion and joy in order to heal ourselves. We rely only on medicines, antibiotics, surgery.

Mindful consumption is the way out, to respond to the fifth question. The sixth question is the same.

Nourishing Brotherhood and Sisterhood

The seventh question: What is the hardest part of the lifestyle you have chosen to lead? And how do you attract young people to follow?

I don't think I have deprived myself of anything I like by choosing to be a monk. In fact, I enjoy the life of a monk. When we follow a vegetarian diet, we are very happy and we don't suffer because we don't eat meat and drink alcohol. We are fortunate to be able to eat vegetarian because we know that we don't have to eat the flesh of other species in order to be alive. You can help protect life by eating. We have to learn to eat in such a way that can preserve our planet and reduce the suffering of living beings. That is why eating vegetarian can be a great joy, especially when you know how to cook.

The life of a monk is much easier than the life of a lay practitioner because as a monk you live in a community and you follow the community in sitting meditation, walking meditation, eating on time. We don't deprive ourselves of anything. In fact, we have a lot of joy living together. We have a lot of time to build brotherhood and sisterhood and that sustains us. Romantic love cannot last as long as brotherhood and sisterhood. We should not continue to rush into the cities, but we should try to create communities in the countryside like Plum Village. You can create a lay community. It's not necessary to be a Buddhist community. We can organize like in a kibbutz and share our cars, our tractors.

The presence of children in a community is very wonderful, and you don't have to be father and mother in order to enjoy the presence of young people or children. I became a monk at the age of sixteen. I don't feel that I suffer because I don't have children, because I have so many spiritual children, monastic and lay. I enjoy very much doing sitting meditation and walking meditation with them. In our retreats, children enjoy holding my hand and doing walking meditation. I don't feel that I am deprived of having children. In a community even if you don't have children you can look at children of other couples as your own children. You can establish your own school where you can teach them the Five Mindfulness Trainings, the art of being happy, how to breathe, how to relax, how to build brotherhood and sisterhood starting in early life.

We can establish communities like Plum Village, a few hundred people living together. We share apartments, houses, cars. Living as a community of two or three hundred people, you can reduce the number of cars by two thirds.

The hardest thing may be to learn how to say no to requests of having retreats, of organizing retreats. This is the most difficult thing we in Plum Village have to face. Everywhere people ask us to come and organize a retreat, but we cannot always say yes. Our heart is broken when we have to say no, but we have to preserve ourselves to continue for a longer time. If there is one hard thing in our life, it is to say no, because the need to have retreats is felt very clearly everywhere.

How do you attract young people to follow? We don't try to attract young people at all; they just come. Many of the young people have experienced romantic love and they have suffered. When they come to our retreats, they see that there is brotherhood and sisterhood. That is what we need the most in our life. We can be ourselves, we can be nourished by the energy of brotherhood and sisterhood.

To create a community and to build brotherhood and sisterhood to nourish us is a very important thing. You can devote your life to doing so. Instead of going to big cities and breathing air that is polluted, we can create many small communities in the countryside and try to live in a way that can help protect Mother Earth. We can work, we can garden together like in Plum Village. You can use your talent to serve the community, building brotherhood and sisterhood. The Five Mindfulness Trainings will be the directive, representing the lifestyle. If young people come to us, it is not because of the Dharma talk we offer; it is the joy, the happiness generated by brotherhood and sisterhood. Our daily practice is to generate the energy of love, brotherhood, and sisterhood.

Establishing small communities like that, we will truly generate the energy of brotherhood, sisterhood. Young people are capable of seeing that. Many of them will devote their lives to Sangha building to help generate the energy that you cannot buy in supermarkets.

Profiting from the Practice

The eighth question: Can we strive for financial and spiritual contentment, or are they mutually exclusive? That means, can you be both rich and spiritual?

Do we need to be rich? Do we need to make money? In Plum Village we also need money, but not to buy things, to consume things. We seek financial support not for buying new and exciting things but to have more places for practitioners to stay during a retreat, or to bring more monastics to a retreat, or to build a meditation hall, or to build monastic quarters. When we go to a city, we need money to buy tickets for Dharma teachers, monastic brothers and sisters, because we know that transformation and healing in a retreat requires the presence of enough Dharma teachers and monastic practitioners.

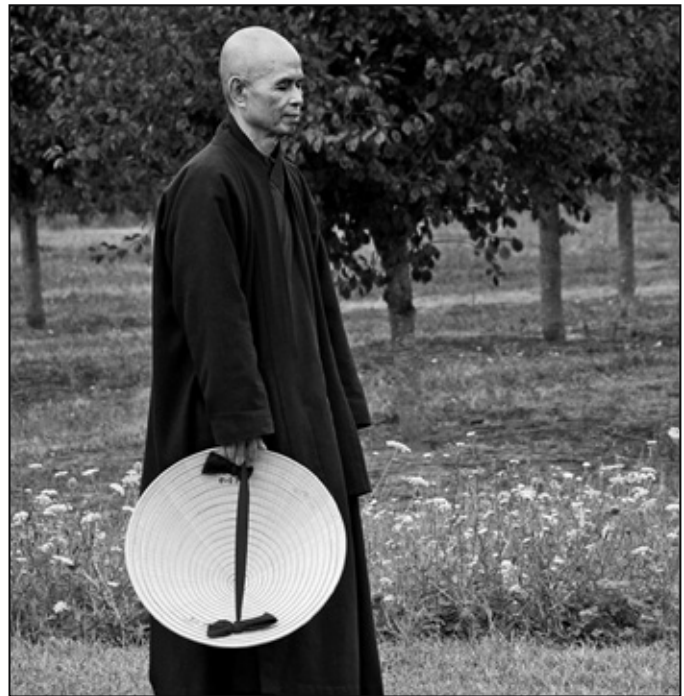


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It's very clear that spiritual practice can bring a lot of happiness and love and fulfillment. You don't need a lot of money to be happy. If there is more financial help, then many more people will profit from the practice. If we are limited by financial conditions, the number of practitioners will not increase. But we do not sacrifice our practice, our spiritual life for the sake of financial realization.

Acting on Two Levels

There is one more question: Most environmentalists narrow down the problems we face to two issues, overconsumption and overpopulation. Where do you stand?

Of course we have to reduce consumption. We have to consume in such a way that can reduce the suffering of species on Earth. This is very clear. But we have to reduce the population also. To be a monk or a nun is one of the ways to reduce overpopulation, so I am calling for you to join us as monks and nuns. And if we can create small communities, and we can establish schools and take care of the children of other couples, we don't miss our children. Although I do not have blood children, I feel that I have a lot of children, and they give me a lot of joy and energy and freshness. I think we have to act on two levels: we have to go down in consumption and go down in population, and this is possible. And we don't have to deprive ourselves of anything, including the presence of children in our life. 🍃

1 The Ten Mindful Movements are described on the web page: www.parallax.org/pdf/10MindfulMovements.pdf

2 To read the Five Mindfulness Trainings, visit: www.mindfulnessbell.org/five_mindfulness_trainings.php

Falling in Love with the Earth

By Thich Nhat Hanh

**When we can truly
see and understand
the Earth, love is
born in our hearts.
We feel connected.
That is the meaning
of love: to be at one.**

Thich Nhat Hanh wrote the following statement in response to a request from the United Nations Climate Change Chief, Christiana Figueres, for the UN “Thought Leadership Series.” The series offers spiritual perspectives in preparation for the Paris climate talks in December 2015. Christiana Figueres considers herself one of Thay’s students, and says his thinking on climate change and Mother Earth has served as a great inspiration for her. She has publicly called upon leaders of faith groups, from Christians and Muslims to Hindus, Jews, and Buddhists, to take the responsibility and opportunity “to provide a moral compass to their followers, and to political, corporate, financial, and local authority leaders” in the next eighteen months. “In doing so,” she says, “faiths and religions can not only secure a healthy and habitable world for all but contribute to the spiritual and physical well-being of humanity now and for generations to come.”

This beautiful, bounteous, life-giving planet we call Earth has given birth to each one of us, and each one of us carries the Earth within every cell of our body.

We and the Earth Are One

The Earth is our mother, nourishing and protecting us in every moment—giving us air to breathe, fresh water to drink, food to eat, and healing herbs to cure us when we are sick.

Every breath we inhale contains our planet’s nitrogen, oxygen, water vapor, and trace elements. When we breathe with mindfulness, we can experience our interbeing with the Earth’s delicate atmosphere, with all the plants, and even with the sun, whose light makes possible the miracle of photosynthesis. With every breath we can experience communion. With every breath we can savor the wonders of life.

We need to change our way of thinking and seeing things. We need to realize that the Earth is not just our environment. The Earth is not something outside of us. Breathing with mindfulness and contemplating your body, you realize that you are the Earth. You realize that your consciousness is also the consciousness of the Earth. Look around you—what you see is not your environment, it is you.

Great Mother Earth

Whatever nationality or culture we belong to, whatever religion we follow, whether we’re Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, or atheists, we can all see that the Earth is not inert matter. She is a great being who has herself given birth to many other great beings—including buddhas and *bodhisattvas*, prophets and saints, sons and daughters of God and humankind. The Earth is a loving mother, nurturing and protecting all peoples and all species without discrimination.

When you realize the Earth is so much more than simply your environment, you'll be moved to protect her in the same way as you would yourself. This is the kind of awareness, the kind of awakening that we need, and the future of the planet depends on whether we're able to cultivate this insight or not.

The Earth and all species on Earth are in real danger. Yet if we can develop a deep relationship with the Earth, we'll have enough love, strength, and awakening in order to change our way of life.

Falling in Love

We can all experience a feeling of deep admiration and love when we see the great harmony, elegance, and beauty of the Earth. A simple branch of cherry blossom, the shell of a snail, or the wing of a bat—all bear witness to the Earth's masterful creativity. Every advance in our scientific understanding deepens our admiration and love for this wondrous planet.

When we can truly see and understand the Earth, love is born in our hearts. We feel connected. That is the meaning of love: to be at one. Only when we've truly fallen back in love with the Earth will our actions spring from reverence and the insight of our interconnectedness.

Yet many of us have become alienated from the Earth. We are lost, isolated, and lonely. We work too hard, our lives are too busy, and we are restless and distracted, losing ourselves in consumption. But the Earth is always there for us, offering us everything we need for our nourishment and healing: the miraculous grain of corn, the refreshing stream, the fragrant forest, the majestic snow-capped mountain peak, and the joyful birdsong at dawn.

True Happiness Is Made of Love

Many of us think we need more money, more power, or more status before we can be happy. We're so busy spending our lives chasing after money, power, and status that we ignore all the conditions for happiness already available.

At the same time, we lose ourselves in buying and consuming things we don't need, putting a heavy strain on both our bodies and the planet. Yet much of what we drink, eat, watch, read, or listen to is toxic, polluting our bodies and minds with violence, anger, fear, and despair.

As well as the carbon dioxide pollution of our physical environment, we can speak of the spiritual pollution of our human environment: the toxic and destructive atmosphere we're creating with our way of consuming. We need to consume in such a way that truly sustains our peace and happiness. Only when we're sustainable as humans will our civilization become sustainable.

It is possible to be happy in the here and the now. We don't need to consume a lot to be happy; in fact we can live very simply. With mindfulness, any moment can become a happy moment. Savoring one simple breath, taking a moment to stop and contemplate

the bright blue sky or to fully enjoy the presence of a loved one can be more than enough to make us happy.

Each one of us needs to come back to reconnect with ourselves, with our loved ones, and with the Earth. It's not money, power, or consuming that can make us happy, but having love and understanding in our heart.

The Bread in Your Hand Is the Body of the Cosmos

We need to consume in such a way that keeps our compassion alive. And yet many of us consume in a way that is very violent. Forests are cut down to raise cattle for beef, or to grow grain for liquor, while millions in the world are dying of starvation.

Reducing the amount of meat we eat and alcohol we consume by fifty percent is a true act of love for ourselves, for the Earth, and for one another. Eating with compassion can already help transform the situation our planet is facing and restore balance to ourselves and the Earth.

Nothing Is More Important than Brotherhood and Sisterhood

There's a revolution that needs to happen and it starts from inside each one of us. We need to wake up and fall in love with Earth. We've been *Homo sapiens* for a long time. Now it's time to become *Homo conscious*.

Our love and admiration for the Earth has the power to unite us and remove all boundaries, separation, and discrimination. Centuries of individualism and competition have brought about tremendous destruction and alienation. We need to re-establish true communication—true communion—with ourselves, with the Earth, and with one another as children of the same mother. We need more than new technology to protect the planet. We need real community and cooperation.

All civilizations are impermanent and must come to an end one day. But if we continue on our current course, there's no doubt that our civilization will be destroyed sooner than we think. The Earth may need millions of years to heal, to retrieve her balance and restore her beauty. She will be able to recover, but we humans and many other species will disappear until the Earth can generate conditions to bring us forth again in new forms.

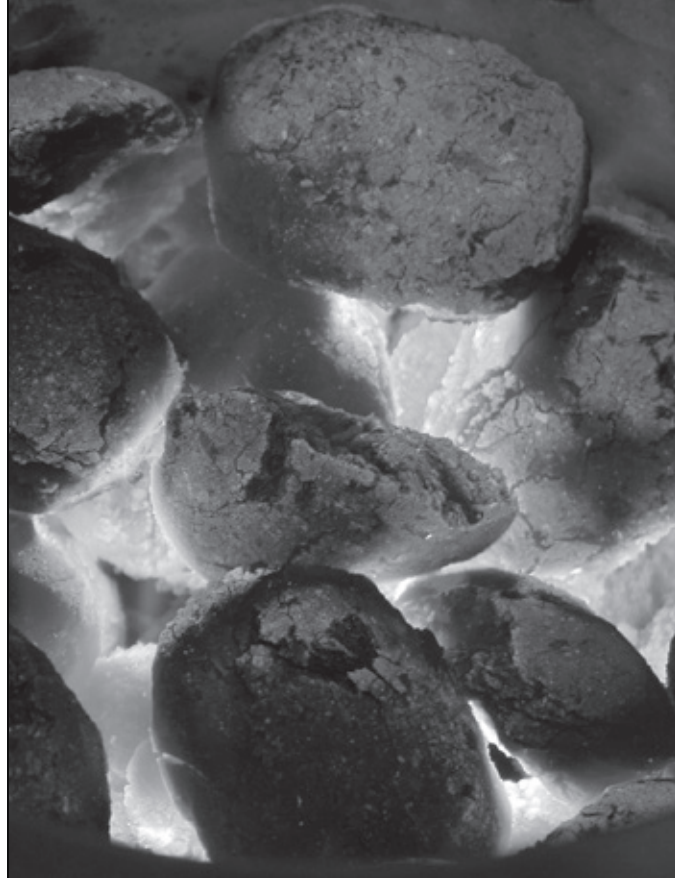
Once we can accept the impermanence of our civilization with peace, we will be liberated from our fear. Only then will we have the strength, awakening, and love we need to bring us together.

Cherishing our precious Earth—falling in love with the Earth—is not an obligation. It is a matter of personal and collective happiness and survival.



The Burning Pit of Climate Change

By Sister Jewel
(Chan Chau Nghiem)



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**Perhaps we need a council of
wise, respected elders who
can listen to the suffering of
climate change and help guide
a mass movement to respond
to it. I think it is important to
look at this as a Sangha.**

Editor's note: This is an excerpt from Sister Jewel's Dharma talk on the four nutriments, given at Mountain Lamp Community in January 2014. The teaching on the third nutriment is printed here; the full talk including the other nutriments can be found online at: www.mindfulnessbell.org/burning-talk-sr-jewel.php.

Let us look at the four nutriments, the four kinds of food that the Buddha talked about in light of what can help us see our connection with all things. The Buddha taught that the first nutriment is edible food, the food we eat with our mouth. The second is sense impressions, what we take in through our eyes as images, our ears as sounds, as well as smells and tastes. The third nutriment is volition, what motivates us in our life, what wakes us up and gets us out of bed in the morning. We want to get something done because we have a vision or a dream that we want to realize. And the fourth is the nutriment of consciousness, thoughts, and memories, all the seeds that are stored in our consciousness and that we feed on. There's individual consciousness, our own personal history and personality and way of seeing, and there's the collective consciousness that we all share.

The Third Nutriment: Volition

I'd like to begin with the third nutriment, volition. I had recently asked a friend whether I should take a certain trip, and her reply spoke to my volition. She asked, "What's most important to you in your life? Life is short; will this trip be in line with what's most important to you?" I think that's a good litmus test, to take the time to look at any decision in light of our deepest desire for our life: Will this support me to live in the way I want to be living?

These four nutriment are food, they are sources of energy, they give birth to what comes to be in our life. We are what we eat, and we are all these things that drive us. So if what we are experiencing in our life now isn't what we want, we have to look at what has fed it, what food has created us. The sutras teach that if we can see the source of the food that has manifested the present situation, then we can be liberated from it, whether it's depression, disharmony, or conflict. We need to understand how it's arisen, what food we've fed it.

Volition can give someone the courage and energy to be a suicide bomber and sacrifice their life for revenge or hatred. And this same energy of volition can inspire us to lead a nation out of colonialism, like Gandhi did in India. They instructs us to discover what our ultimate concern is rather than to only focus on material and emotional comfort. The volition we are fed in our consumer society is to use our energy to get material and emotional comfort. We are given many messages that these are the most important things and all we need. While it is essential to understand and meet our basic needs, true freedom and happiness are made of a profound connection and meaning that is vaster than the security gained by attaining material and emotional comforts.

In the traditional practice of Ayurvedic healing in India, a doctor was not to charge for services. Patients would often offer a donation of whatever they were able to (it could be in livestock or food), but doctors weren't allowed to require payment. A similar principle exists in the Native American shamanic tradition. In *The Wind Is My Mother*, a medicine man named Bear Heart shares that healers cannot use their sacred power and medicine for their own advantage or they will lose their power or it will become corrupted; they can only use it to help others. There is a trust in the flow of giving and receiving, a confidence that our needs will be met when we orient ourselves towards the well-being of all.

These are two examples of volition, pointing to our intention, our motivation for doing something. When our volition is focused in a wholesome direction, we receive a lot of energy and support to continue, and when it's focused on the ultimate concern and on service to the whole, it keeps us in our integrity. It keeps us from betraying ourselves and others. If our volition doesn't take into account our interbeing with all other things, it will likely be harmful to ourselves and to others. And if we don't take the time to clearly look at what is driving our life, our volition can be hijacked by the collective volitions of greed and consumption that seem to be running our current world.

The Burning Coals of Climate Change

In the Buddha's teaching on the four nutriment, he used an example for each nutriment. For the food of volition, he described a man in a village where there is a huge pit filled with burning coals. The man knows he needs to leave that village so he won't be thrown into that pit or fall into it and die. The pit represents

the unwholesome ways in which we manifest our volition through greed, hatred, or ignorance.

This image of burning coals is especially appropriate to our times because the unwholesome volition we have cultivated as a collective is what has brought about climate change.¹ The pit of burning coals that we need to move away from is the harm we are causing the planet. And what has fed this destructive volition is the wish to constantly accumulate and consume more. The definition of happiness as material success or external well-being keeps us busy, so we don't have time to be in touch with what's really happening and what's needed, and to respond appropriately.

In our society, in which large, multinational corporations have disproportionate control, our job is to be consumers; and we can also use consumption as a kind of escape. In an interview in *The Sun* magazine,² philosopher and environmentalist Kathleen Dean Moore says, "Let's face it, our culture is hooked on cheap oil and consumer goods and we exhibit all the self-destructive behaviors of addicts. We devote our days to the pursuit of the next hit. We have developed enabling behaviors to allow our addictions to go unchallenged, to deny that they do any harm. I think the addiction to consumer goods is a response to the loss of community, self-sufficiency, meaningful work, neighborly love and hope. When these things are taken from us, we look for the cheap fix, which is turning out to be very expensive indeed."

When we don't feel we have a direction, a meaningful purpose for our life, then we often take refuge in consumption, in what doesn't fill our real needs, in what destroys our planet, in what destroys the inheritance of many future generations.

Gratitude as a Revolutionary Act

Eco-philosopher Joanna Macy is a scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology. She speaks about the importance of gratitude in our work of healing, that it's particularly relevant when we're surrounded by what we don't like, because gratitude is not dependent on external conditions. There is something similar in the Second Mindfulness Training: "I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy." So we can practice gratitude at any time.

Macy says that "late capitalism instills in us inadequacy, self-loathing, and neediness. It's like a worm in an apple, this insinuation of personal insufficiency." We are meant to consume and we believe we must have certain things to be socially acceptable. So in this setting, gratitude is a revolutionary act because we are not buying into the idea that we need more. We instead can accept that we are okay the way we are.

A Council of Elders

In *The Sun* interview, Kathleen Dean Moore speaks of the need for us all to take action. The interviewer DeMocker com-

ments, “Many of us are waiting until our lives feel less busy before we jump into activism.” Moore responds by saying:

Yes, we are busy. Probably too busy to avert a planetary disaster that will have the effect of an asteroid impact: killing off species, altering the climate, acidifying the oceans. Why are we so busy? Those who would prefer we not think about climate change and other injustices would like very much for us to stay busy. If we have to work two jobs to make a living, we’re not going to be out in the streets protesting. If we are preoccupied with other parts of our lives, our attention is drawn away from the practices that are destroying the foundation of those lives.

I used to think it was enough for all of us simply to live our lives imaginatively and constructively. I don’t think that anymore. I think we have to find the time to be politically active. I don’t want to cut anybody any slack on that. Are we going to let it all slip away — all those billions of years it took to evolve the song in a frog’s throat or the stripe in a lily — because we’re too busy?

The ransacking of the world is making the top one percent of the population very, very rich. As the writer Daniel Quinn points out, the rich are like people who live in a fancy penthouse at the top of a hundred-story building, and every day they send workers down to take some bricks out of the foundation to increase the size of the penthouse. The building has lots of bricks, so this seems harmless enough. But there will come a time when they will have introduced so many holes in the foundation that the building will collapse, and their position at the top of the tower will not save them.

She suggests how people might become politically active:

The reason nonviolent methods haven’t worked is because we haven’t really tried them yet. We haven’t tried massive protests and civil disobedience. We haven’t tried boycotts. We haven’t harnessed the power of the global religions. Somewhere near half of us don’t even vote. Here and there, sure, we’ve tried nonviolence, but not on the scale we need. Let’s give it a go.

Oren Lyons, faithkeeper of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation, suggests that we need a global council of elders, people like Jimmy Carter and Nelson Mandela and Sheila Watt-Cloutier. They could get together and choose one company to be the target of a global boycott. Every environmental organization, every organization for social change, every church that honors God’s creation could call on its members to join the boycott. How many points would the targeted company’s stock have to drop before it entered into negotiations and transformed itself? Then the council of elders could choose the next company, and the next.

In April 2014, Archbishop Desmond Tutu called for a South-African-style boycott of fossil fuel companies in *The Guardian*. Former head of the Anglican Church of England, Rowan Williams, also encouraged his faith community to divest from oil companies. Catholic groups are currently urging Pope Francis to propose a global Catholic boycott of fossil fuel companies.

After 9/11, Thay suggested the formation of a Council of Sages to begin sessions of deep listening to hear the suffering in the country and the suffering of those in the Middle East, similar to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in South Africa. Perhaps we need a council of wise, respected elders who can listen to the suffering of climate change and help guide a mass movement to respond to it. I think it is important to look at this as a Sangha.³

Choosing Consciously for Healthy Nourishment

A few years ago, a brother introduced me to a website and a book called *The Better World Shopper Guide*, www.betterworldshopper.org. It lists companies across all sectors of the economy based on five criteria: human rights, the environment, animal protection, community involvement, and social justice. It lists the twenty worst companies and the twenty best companies. It also lists the top ten categories of purchases that make the most impact in the world. The one that makes the most difference is where we bank and the second is where we buy our gasoline. For many years in our community, I have encouraged the Sangha not to buy gas from Shell or Exxon-Mobil, as these are the two worst oil companies in terms of the five criteria above.

In the interview with Kathleen Dean Moore, DeMocker asks: “The major paradigm-changing social movements in history—the civil-rights movement, the abolitionist movement, the independence movement in India—have mostly been campaigns against oppression. Who are the oppressors in the climate-change movement?” Moore responds:

Transnational petrochemical industries, their leaders, their investors, and the politicians they control.

For a long time activists were unclear about this. The corporations were happy to claim that they were simply responding to public demand. Only recently has it become clear how much corporations have been manipulating public demand. They build and maintain infrastructures that force consumers to use fossil fuels. They convince politicians to kill or lethally underfund alternative energy or transportation initiatives. They increase demand for energy-intensive products through advertising. They create confusion about the harmful effects of burning fossil fuels. They influence elections to defang regulatory agencies that would limit Big Oil’s power to impose risks and costs on others. And, whenever possible, they work outside of democracies.

If you own stock in a petrochemical industry, you've got to dump it. If you benefit from a fund that owns stock in a petro-chemical industry—a university fund, a retirement fund—you've got to insist they dump it. No excuses, no delays.

In our Sanghas, we can think about ways we might address what's deep in our hearts. Making conscious choices of where to spend is a practice of the four nutriments, because if we buy from companies we don't believe in, we're feeding ourselves something harmful and we're also feeding that harm to our society. And buying from the companies we do believe in is choosing healthy nourishment for ourselves and for our society. This is acting with the insight of interbeing.

Clearing Inner Pollution

We pollute through our consumption of goods, but we also pollute with our thinking. There is a monk in Thailand who works to protect the forests from logging and he encourages people not to pollute with their thoughts: with their anger, judgment, and blame. In his teachings to us at the European Institute of Applied Buddhism, Dharma teacher Ha Vinh Tho encouraged us not to blame others for the suffering we see and experience in the world, and when we look at global issues not to see them as external to us. He offers that the first thing we need to transform is our idea of a world out there, "them, the bad guys." We're part of it and we're co-creating it. He said, "There's only one world. So we must always come back to ourselves when we suffer or feel anger at things around us."

I think we can work on holding our own anger and blame with mindfulness and compassion as we actively hold those people and structures around us accountable for injustice and oppression. This is what I think it means to live the teaching of engaged Buddhism.

In personal relationships, I've experienced getting into a negative attachment with someone I have difficulty with. The person begins to occupy a huge part of my thinking because I am so upset with them. I see them as my problem, the cause of my suffering. We need to let go of that way of perceiving, step back, see the bigger perspective so that our whole life doesn't revolve around them and our resentments towards them. It doesn't mean that we don't need to address problems in our relationships, because we definitely do, and there are helpful practices like *Beginning Anew* and the *Peace Treaty* for this. I know I need to keep my perspective and not think that if that problem is gone, everything will be okay, because my mind always creates more. The problem is not really coming from the outside.

One morning someone came to the dining hall late for breakfast and I was irritated because I perceived that this person did that a lot. I just stopped and I asked myself, would I be happy if the person had come on time? And I realized, no, I would have found some other reason to be irritated at them. On another oc-

casional, I was having difficulty with someone, and I thought if they would move to a different practice center, everything would be better. That person did go to another center for a few months, and I thought, now we can all be more at ease. But it was the opposite—things got worse. It was clear that the other person was not the problem, at least not more of the problem than I was. Both our happiness and our suffering are born inside of us and if we take care of them within us, it's a huge contribution to the situation on our planet.

I was at Findhorn during a gathering on sustainability, where people from eco-villages, co-housing, and intentional living communities all over the world came together to meet. Robert Gilman, the founder of The Context Institute, the first organization that began to look at global sustainability in the 1970s, said in his opening plenary talk, "There are no environmental problems; there are only environmental symptoms of human problems."

Climate change is a symptom, a reflection of our unskillful way of consuming each of the four nutriments. If we can come back to ourselves to look deeply into how we are consuming the foods of consciousness, sense impressions, volition, and edible food, we can address our human problems and thereby heal our environmental problems.

This is why we need to practice diligently, to uproot these human problems, which occur inside and around us. The Buddha said that it's with our minds that we create the world. Charlotte Joko Beck said, "As long as we don't feel open and loving, our practice is right there waiting for us and since most of the time we don't feel open and loving, most of the time we should be practicing meticulously." 🙏

- 1 A new term being used now is "global impact" instead of "global warming," to help us understand that this impacts all of us. In some places it may get colder with climate change, so people can mistakenly believe global warming is of no concern. "Climate chaos" is another term that is being used.
- 2 Dean Moore, Kathleen. "If Your House Is on Fire." *The Sun*: Dec. 2012. Available at: http://thesunmagazine.org/issues/444/if_your_house_is_on_fire
- 3 For more information, please see: www.mindfulnessbell.org/statement.php.

Transcribed by Annie Speiser

*Sister Jewel (Chan Chau Nghiem) grew up in the US and Kenya, and ordained as a nun in 1999. She is energized by sharing mindfulness and compassion, especially with children and young people, and by bringing mindfulness to teachers and schools as part of the Wake Up Schools movement. She is editor of *Planting Seeds: Practicing Mindfulness with Children* by Thich Nhat Hanh.*





photo by Robert Felker

A Planetary Awakening

*By Lou Leonard and
Kristin Barker*

During his life, the Buddha foretold that the next Buddha would be Maitreya, the Buddha of Love. Venerable Thich Nhat Hanh has predicted that “Maitreya Buddha may be a community and not just an individual.”¹ This powerful thought at once reminds us of both the truth of interdependence and the power of Sangha. What if Maitreya Buddha were in fact not just an enlightened community, but an entire planet waking up?

The challenge of climate change and our dependence on fossil fuels represents the clearest and most pernicious example of the root causes of suffering playing out in a global, systemic way. The recent International Dharma Teachers’ Statement on Climate Change explained climate change as “perhaps humanity’s greatest teacher yet about how the mental forces [of craving, aversion, and delusion], when unchecked in ourselves and our institutions, cause harm to other people and the living environment.”²

The size of the challenge is difficult to overstate, for its causes seem so ingrained in habitual patterns and dominant systems. Understandably, we feel anxious and even hopeless about the possibility of turning things around. The Dharma offers medicine. Not only does climate change demonstrate the truth of the Dharma, but also the Dharma instructs us on how to respond.

The Buddha taught that when we are faced with similar challenges at the individual level—which can seem just as daunting at times as climate change—there

is a tested path to waking up. By seeing clearly, accepting the truth of what is, speaking wisely, and acting with compassion in response to the truth, we can be with anything and promote peace.

Okay, you say, but at this scale, action by individuals is important but not enough. What we need is the entire world to wake up and that's not realistic, at least on the time scale we need.

Realistic or not, it is happening. A form of widespread awakening in fact already has begun. Not surprisingly, it has started with non-human life, which is not encumbered by our wonderful and complex human mind. Earth's oceans grow warmer and more acidic every year; skies hold much more heat and energy, creating stronger storms; plants, amazingly, are beginning to move en masse as habitats shift; and other animals move as well in search of new homes and food. All are responding and all are changing. In fact, the entire system of life around us is acting on the truth of climate change, and even sooner than our watchful scientists expected.

The Power of Sangha

Now it is our turn. With the knowledge that the society of life on Earth is responding to climate change, we can look around our workplaces, our schools, our neighborhoods, and our Sanghas for all fellow beings ready to respond to this call to life. For we need each other. On this point, the teachings of both the Buddha and Western psychology agree.

In her essay on psychoanalysis and climate change, Sally Weintrobe advises that "coping with issues of the magnitude of climate change is not possible at an individual level. Facing the uncertainties posed by current threats is only possible by joint effort in a social community."³ And as the Buddha explained to faithful Ananda, "Good spiritual friends are the whole of the holy life. Find refuge in the Sangha community."

We know from our experience that our spiritual Sanghas in particular can provide an ideal space to speak truths that often go unspoken in other parts of life. And by sharing together in Sangha, we create a container to hold the enormous anxiety and sadness that can come with seeing the truth. Through our own practice and the vital support of Sangha, we realize that we can be with anything and often unlock streams of energy and dedication. We are thus encouraged and strengthened to speak and act with wisdom and compassion in ever-widening circles of our lives.

An Uncomfortable Truth

Yet this jewel serves only if we let it shine. And here may be an uncomfortable truth. As Rob Burbea, Resident Teacher at Gaia House, notes, "It is humbling to admit that we as Buddhist meditators and Dharma Teachers, teachers of mindfulness, investigation and compassion are not immune to the psychological defense mechanisms [that humans use against the climate crisis]."⁴



Upcoming retreats

November 07 - 09	Meditation & Education (Col. students & educators)
October 03 - 05	Mindful Couples - Theme Weekend
October 17 - 19	Thay Giac Thanh Memorial Dana Weekend - Event

More information about retreats, special events and theme weekends is available online:
www.deerparkmonastery.org www.facebook.com/deerparkmonastery

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In fact, in the face of the great anxiety and shame that arise over our own responsibility, our minds can even turn to the Dharma as an excuse not to act. As Joanna Macy reminds us, the mind can create “‘spiritual traps’ that cut the nerve of compassionate action.” These include the wrong views that Buddhism conceives of the world as an “impermanent illusion,”⁵ or that “suffering [is] a mistake that can be cured solely within our minds,” or that “freedom from suffering is attainable only through non-attachment to the fate of all beings.”⁶

As Buddhists, we are far from immune to the treacherous charnel ground of climate suffering. Yet we also have the tools to face it. We can seek refuge in Sangha itself. Burbea compels us, “We have to talk about this issue. And we have to actually do something about it. If we, as Teachers or as the wider Sangha cannot, or will not, even have this discussion, what does that say about us, and about the state of the Dharma?”⁷

The Road to Paris

As world leaders come together in Paris in December 2015 to create strong collective climate action, there will be many important moments to act. Unlike the talks in Copenhagen five years ago, the “road” to Paris will be as important as Paris itself. There will be key milestones leading up to the Paris talks where progress must be made. One of the most important is March of 2015, the deadline for new national climate targets, when each country will show what it is willing to contribute to a safer future for us all.

The road to Paris begins in September 2014, when UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon calls every head of state to New York to jointly commit to success. To clarify the depth and breadth of our concern, so-called regular folks from all over the world also come to New York in the largest public gathering for climate action in human history—the People’s March. Local communities also hold parallel actions in solidarity. A world of people is coming together.

Wise Speech, Wise Action

As Buddhists, we have something unique and powerful to add to this moment and this movement. Peaceful, compassionate action that is deeply committed is balanced by the long view, recognizing that the challenge of addressing a warming world will be with us for many lifetimes. So we choose our moments, dedicate our efforts, and release our attachments to any specific outcome. By seeing and using the power of Sangha, we not only support each other and discover important lessons for the rest of humanity, but also provide stronger conviction for Buddhists to act.

We are all invited to join events such as the People’s March as an expression of a Buddhist wisdom path. A global community of teachers and practitioners is expressing a Buddhist response to climate change as part of a new organization, One Earth Sangha. This online network, a Sangha of Sanghas, puts action on climate in the context of spiritual practice. One Earth Sangha

offers Dharma, connects Sanghas, and coordinates participation in events like these so that we can be together, in Sangha. We invite you to join us in future actions. Come to www.oneearth-sangha.org to learn more.

There are times for silence; there are times for speaking. It is time for the global Buddhist community to turn toward this suffering, look courageously, look deeply, and then speak our hearts’ wisdom.



- 1 *Cultivating the Mind of Love* (Parallax Press, 2008)
- 2 The Earth as Witness: International Dharma Teachers’ Statement on Climate Change, One Earth Sangha
- 3 *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives at 31* (Sally Weintrobe, ed.) (Routledge, 2013)
- 4 Rob Burbea, *Dharma Teaching and Dharma Values in the Age of Climate Change*, SanghaSeva
- 5 Joanna Macy, *On Being with Our World, A Buddhist Response to the Climate Emergency* (John Stanley, David R. Loy, and Gyurme Dorje, eds.) (Wisdom Publications, 2009)
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Rob Burbea, *Dharma Teaching and Dharma Values in the Age of Climate Change*, SanghaSeva

Lou Leonard is a lifelong environmentalist who leads the climate change program at World Wildlife Fund (WWF), while co-founding One Earth Sangha in his personal capacity. Lou is deeply grateful for the refuge he has found in the Dharma and the teachers who have helped him find it.



Kristin Barker is a co-founder of One Earth Sangha, an active member of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington, D.C. (IMCW), and a board member of the Buddhist Insight Network. She holds a master’s degree in Environmental Management from Duke University and currently works at the Pew Charitable Trusts.



Forest of Interbeing

By Christoph Neger



Christoph Neger

Forest of Interbeing is a reforestation project run voluntarily by young mindfulness practitioners from all over the world whose aim is to reforest, and maintain deforested land in the Mexican state of Veracruz. We are working in cooperation with a Mexican nature conservation association, local communities, international funders, and the Wake Up Community in Mexico and abroad.

I studied geography at Graz University in my native Austria with special focus on sustainable development. In 2012 I came to the Tuxtlas region in Mexico to do my thesis on ecotourism, and I continued to stay here. I knew about the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh from reading books and watching YouTube videos, but hadn't had a chance to attend a Sangha or a retreat. I went to a Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction course and later found out about the Wake Up movement on the Internet (www.wkup.org). I wanted to be part of Wake Up, but I was reluctant to start a group because I thought that I wasn't ready.

Then a few months ago, I wrote to Brandon Rennels from Wake Up International and got a lot of encouragement and resources to practice, so I started a Wake Up group in Los Tuxtlas. Though there is a lot of interest, there is not an established group that meets regularly yet, but I'm optimistic that there will be soon.

I came up with the Forest of Interbeing project because when I found out about the massive deforestation of the tropical rainforest here and the many problems related to it (loss of biodiversity, scarcity of water in the dry season

**Reforestation returns
homes to many living
beings and diverse
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which we have
related to nature.**

on the one hand and soil erosion and flooding in the rainy season on the other hand, and on a global level, climate change), I saw that my thesis and the government programs in my region didn't have a lot of impact. That made me motivated to become more active in working on projects that are good for the Earth. They always says that if you want to do something that has an impact, you need a Sangha.

So I had an idea, proposed the project to the international Wake Up Sanghas, and thought, "Let's see what's going to happen." It was amazing what happened. There was a lot of interest and enthusiasm.

We are currently focusing our efforts on five project areas in Mexico, located in the Los Tuxtlas region of Veracruz. Los Tuxtlas is the northernmost tropical rainforest area in America and an area of high biodiversity value that is home to many threatened plant and animal species. By replanting parcels of land where tropical forest has been destroyed for ranching, we can have a real impact. Reforestation returns homes to many living beings and diverse wildlife that have suffered from the unskillful way in which we have related to nature. Restoring these lands will also allow our descendants to enjoy a healthy Mother Earth.

In doing a project like this, it is sometimes difficult to concentrate on the present moment and not dream about the future; that is a constant challenge. Just because you are working on a mindfulness project doesn't mean you are always mindful. When I'm out in nature to look at places we might reforest, it is easy to connect with the present moment. It is more difficult when I'm on the computer.

Working together with a few friends from Wake Up has been a wonderful experience. We've had Skype calls every two weeks, and our virtual meetings have been very joyful. It's great how everyone has been showing up, participating, and trying to help in this project.

There is also interest from mindfulness practitioners in other parts of Mexico to come and help, as well as from schools in this area. That is an important aspect of the project; it is a kind of environmental education, where children and young adults can work on conserving the environment. I think this has much more impact than learning about these things in the classroom. By now (July 2014), we have already reforested 120 trees on the land of a private person and of a school. If everything goes well, we will continue to plant many more the rest of this summer.

Right now we are focusing our efforts to reforest on the land of people willing to provide parts of their land. However, for the long run our goal is to purchase land in strategic places for conservation, for example to protect headwaters, to enlarge remaining forest areas, and to establish corridors between isolated wooded areas, which are very important for biodiversity. Land prices are very low here in Los Tuxtlas, but still this would require much more funding than our current activities.

Our dream is that this Forest of Interbeing will continue to grow and nourish the intercultural connections and the collective mind of love in our worldwide communities and Sanghas. 🍃

A version of this article was published on the Wake Up International website: <http://www.wkup.org/deforestation-los-tuxtlas-mexico/>

Wake Up Events

2014

October 16-19
Four-Day Retreat
Wake Up Ireland

Wake Up Tour of South America

October 1-7
Quito, Ecuador

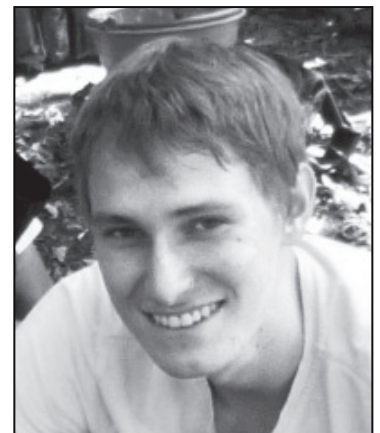
October 7-16
Bogotá, Colombia

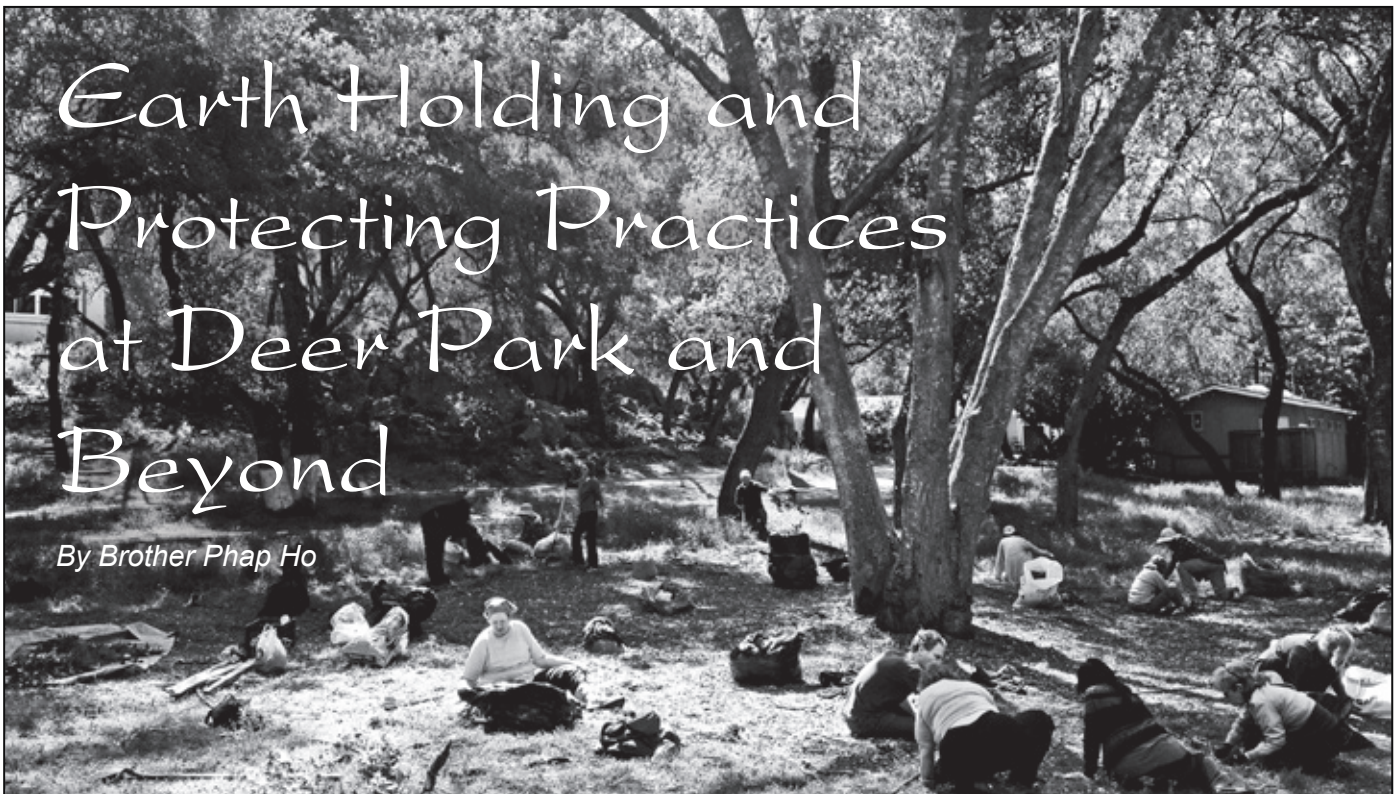
October 16-22
Managua, Nicaragua

Oct 22-Nov 4
México

The Wake Up movement offers mindfulness practice to young adults (18-35 years of age). For more information about Wake Up events, please visit wkup.org.

Christoph Neger, Solidez Radiante del Corazón – Radiating Solidity of the Heart, was born in Graz, Austria. He received the Five Mindfulness Trainings on a retreat in Ahuatepec, Mexico in 2014. He works online for an Austrian economic research company and lives in San Andrés Tuxtla, Veracruz, Mexico, where he enjoys the friendliness of local people and the area's wonderful nature.





Working meditation, Deer Park Monastery oak grove

photo courtesy of monastic Sangha

We are a continuation ...

In the fall of 2008, Thay spent a couple of weeks at Deer Park Monastery. One afternoon, all the monastics sat with Thay for a Be-In. During his sharing, Thay stressed that the first thing we all must do is *consume less*. He encouraged us to consider our means of transportation, how we could combine trips, continue car-free days, etc. During the US Tour of 2007, in all public talks, Thay had shared in detail about the consequences of meat and alcohol consumption for our environment. Continually watering our seeds of love and care for the Earth for them to be expressed in our daily life, our teacher is a great gardener.

The inauguration of Deer Park's solar panels was a joyous occasion in September of 2007. They were in use by February of 2008 and were calculated to cover all of our electric use after an energy audit had been completed and all light fixtures had been replaced. Thanks to the support of many Friends of Deer Park, our water use has been reduced. We use mulch rather than growing grass that is ultimately eaten by rabbits. Water-free urinals as well as native and drought-resistant planting have contributed to lessening our collective water consumption. We have also tried

to replenish the groundwater by slowing, spreading, and sinking the rainwater we receive. This is an ongoing Earth project.

Together, the fourfold Sangha also looked at what are we already doing to use less and lighten our footsteps on our precious home. This gave rise to *The Greening Way of Deer Park* (a list of ways we are reducing our impact on the Earth and learning to care for our Mother) and an article, "Walking the Green Path," written by Laura Hunter several years ago, which was published in *the Mindfulness Bell* and *Buddhist Culture*.

A Shared Aspiration: Earth Protection

A couple of years ago, I asked myself if, in my life of practice and service, I would regret anything when I looked back ten or twenty years from now. Spontaneously and immediately, an aspiration arose: to find more ways of bringing mindfulness and community practice to the area of climate change. In a way, it surprised me because my biology knowledge peaked in sixth grade. I also have never been an activist. I have always found solace in nature, though, and by nurturing the concentration on

and insight of interbeing on a daily basis, I feel more connected and responsible. I realized that suffering caused by discrimination, war, social justice, and so on, all stem from the ignorant view of separation from the Earth and other living beings.

I shared about this inspiration with the Dharma Teacher Council at Deer Park, and many others also felt inspired. The first concrete manifestation of this inspiration was a blog. When we were planning our yearly retreat schedule for 2014, I asked to include a theme weekend on Earth Protection, which was accepted. In the process, Heather Mann and Nomi Green (OI members) shared their aspiration in this area with me, both inspired to find more ways of serving. They are sincere practitioners who are also educated in ecology and have activist experience, so I invited them to come and help. The theme weekends at Deer Park include only four sessions for the topic, so we had much sharing on how to use this limited and precious time.

The first evening, we gathered in the Green Yurt for our introduction to each other and the evening. Once it got dark, we each lit up a candle, and in the spirit of a pilgrimage on the Earth, we practiced walking meditation up to Yen Tu Mountain, the highest plateau at Deer Park, where the White Buddha statue is sitting peacefully. We gathered in a circle to sing “May Earth be filled with loving kindness, may Earth be well, may Earth be peaceful and at ease, may Earth be happy,” to the tune of “Amazing Grace.” We continued our practice of returning to the embrace of the Earth while facing Escondido with all its lights and freeways, and reading one of Thay’s love letters to the Earth. As we stood with lit candles, peacefully following our breathing, reflecting on our lives here on Earth, one friend asked herself, “What have we done?”

On Saturday morning, as a group we practiced working meditation in the oak grove of Clarity Hamlet, removing non-native invasive grasses under the oaks. Some of us were not comfortable to pull out the grasses and instead helped to collect them. This offered an opportunity to practice supporting the health of the oaks and to find a way to work together whether we were happy to remove the grasses or not.

The greatest benefit seemed to be simply coming together to practice with others who have Earth holding and protecting at the forefront of their work or engagement. It was very healing to hear sharing on how people practiced internally with despair, battle-weariness or doubt, and maintained a healthy and balanced engagement. We also shared about finding skillful ways to share with friends, neighbors, or colleagues without getting caught in dogmatic views. The talk and sharing from the retreat are available on the Deer Park Dharmacast, for those with a taste for more samples of this retreat.


Engaging Together in Love

During our last session together, we reflected on how to continue our engagement individually and collectively (see the blog post of April 22). A couple of concrete things also took

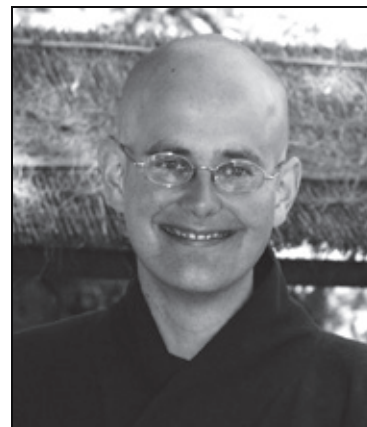
shape. To help us continue to learn from others’ insights and experiences, a newsletter will be put together quarterly; it will include practices as well as individual and local Sangha stories of practice and engagement, all with the growing edge of climate crisis as a theme. In addition to these ongoing efforts, we hope to collect practice tools and links in an Earth Holding booklet. Our intention is to continue to offer support, reminders, and inspiration so that the engagement that is already taking place individually and collectively can continue to grow and develop. New seeds will also have the occasion to sprout and blossom.

During the last sharing with Heather, Nomi, and Lyn Fine after the retreat, it was clear to me that the strength of our Sangha in relation to climate crisis is to contribute in a way that:

- we engage in love, not fear,
- we engage in togetherness, not in separation, and
- we engage diligently and aimlessly.

Mindfulness of breathing and walking, loving speech, and deep listening are powerful sources of refuge and energy in this practice and engagement. We continue Thay as we sing, “Happiness is here and now. I have dropped my worries.” 

Brother Phap Ho was born and raised in Sweden. He grew up in a family that conserved water and electricity. Reusing and recycling was already built in to Swedish society. He was ordained as a novice in Plum Village in 2003 and has lived in Deer Park Monastery, California, since 2006.



Earth Holding Resources:

Newsletter: To sign up to receive it, or to offer a contribution, contact: newsletter@earthholdinghereandnow.org

Blog: earthholdinghereandnow.org

Sharing from our wider Sangha is warmly welcome for the blog. Contact: blog@earthholdinghereandnow.org.

Deer Park Dharmacast: deerpark.libsyn.com

The Greening Way of Deer Park:

earthholdinghereandnow.org/earth-holding-practice-at-deer-park-monastery

Awakening and Responding to Climate Change

By John R. Snyder and George Hoguet

In January 2014, the Order of Interbeing discussion list hosted a particularly rich dialogue about climate change and our practice. It became clear that many of us who are locally involved in climate change initiatives have felt isolated and sometimes overwhelmed by the magnitude of the need. Yet, our Sangha experience has taught us that working together is a source of joy when the work gets hard. The OI Climate Response (OICR) group was born as a way of bringing together those in the OI who wish to deepen their practice in the light of climate change.

Six months later, OICR is a still-growing, still-evolving community of thirty-four OI members and aspirants. As we continue to learn how to flow as a river, we have discussed many things and shared many perspectives. We have found that being together on OICR allows us to support and encourage each other, reminding one another and ourselves of the rich resources in our tradition and the capacity for awakening to the present in all beings.

We have posed some key questions for ourselves: What can we as a community formed by the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings bring to the world's great work in responding to climate change? How do we specifically answer the call for engagement in the tenth and eleventh trainings? So many climate change organizations are already formed; so many agendas are already being advocated—are we just reinventing the wheel? We think not. Just as Thay's teachings on mindfulness were first offered to the American peace movement of the 1960s, we believe that our practice has much to offer the world during this time of unprecedented impermanence.

The *bodhisattva* path we follow offers a grounded, creative, and joyful way to engage with this most challenging world crisis. As the planet enters a time of great uncertainty, we practice to understand our limitations as human beings, to have respect for

Climate Change Resources

Following are web links to resources that may help us to better understand the conditions of global warming and resultant climate change and consequences:

Climate Basics in 24 Cards - <http://www.vox.com/cards/global-warming/what-is-global-warming>

National Climate Assessment 2014: Impacts - <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/highlights>

Buddhism & the Climate-Energy Emergency - <http://www.ecobuddhism.org/wisdom/editorials/bcee/>

The Dalai Lama & 350 ppm - http://www.ecobuddhism.org/bcp/all_content/350_hhdl/

The Low Carbon Diet (Lifestyle) - <https://www.empowermentinstitute.net/index.php/community/community-empowerment>

Eat Low Carbon from Bon Appetit - <http://www.eatlowcarbon.org/>

If you could be any plant, animal, or mineral, what would you tell humans about protecting the Earth?

I would be a lynx. I would tell people not to kill animals for their fur. — Katie

Every plant or animal plays an important role in the food chain. Please don't demolish that role. — Alec

If I was a tree, I would tell someone, "Please don't cut me down." — Anonymous

I would be a shark and I would tell the people that cut the sharks' fins that they hurt them, that sharks can suffer and have feelings. I would tell them to stop. Sometimes they cut the fins and put the sharks back in the sea but that way they suffer more because they will die anyway. They should stop and show compassion for animals.
— Raphaelle

**How do you help
to reverse the process of climate change?**

Being vegetarian is my specific way of helping reverse the process of climate change. Breeding cattle for human consumption uses a lot of resources, including water, in addition to generating a lot of suffering among animals. I feel like I am being kind to the earth when I limit my consumption to plants. I still eat eggs and cheese but I am reducing them and hopefully I will become vegan one day. The Five Contemplations are helping me in this regard. This is a beautiful prayer that helps me eat mindfully and in turn choose better what I am consuming.

– Virginia

for productive ways to learn from them, support them, and possibly partner with them in the future. We especially look forward to working closely with the Earth Holding and Protecting initiative at Deer Park Monastery.

non-human bodhisattvas, and to remind ourselves that “truth is found in life” if we stay open to our experience. When discussions and decisions are mired in controversy and absolute thinking, we ask ourselves, “Are you sure?” and practice non-attachment to views.

When we act, we act from a deep practice of reverence for life and from the direct experience of interbeing. We remind ourselves of the practice gatha, “Peace in oneself, peace in the world.” We know that our path holds together and affirms the nonduality of the inner work and outer work of the practice, and that, like the two legs of a healthy child, they must grow and develop together. Following the bodhisattva path, we know that we do not practice just for our liberation but for that of the whole world with all its humans, animals, plants, and minerals.

Above all, a bodhisattva practices without expectations and attachment to outcomes. Regardless of outcome, we know that a flourishing life is one lived in full mindful engagement with the world, that positive change is the inevitable result of right action, and that liberation—both inner and outer—comes from fully knowing both the suffering and the exquisite beauty found in each moment. Members of OICR are involved in many local, national, and international efforts related to climate change, and we have been sharing with each other what we know about these efforts and looking

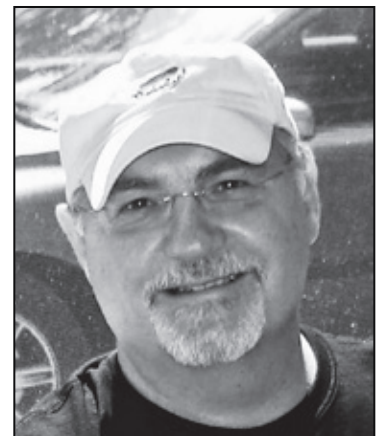
We have a goal of reaching out to the more than 650 local Sanghas practicing in our tradition, seeking to find at least one OI member or aspirant in each Sangha to be part of OICR. Building an international network will allow us to conduct a “census” of efforts already underway in our community and to help raise awareness of those efforts. We are also hoping to develop study materials for use by local Sanghas. We hope to offer concrete suggestions and actions that can be taken individually and as a community according to a fivefold schema: Save Water, Grow Food, Conserve Energy, Build Community, Celebrate Interbeing.

OI members and aspirants who want to join or receive more information can contact George (george.hoguet@gmail.com) or John (jsnyder@pobox.com).

John Snyder, True Precious Goodness, practices with Plum Blossom Sangha in Austin, Texas. He is a retired Montessori elementary teacher and school administrator.



George Hoguet, True Precious Smile, lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and practices with the Laughing Rivers Sangha. He is retired, spending much time with his six grandchildren and working in The Climate Reality Project as one of the educational presenters trained by former Vice President Al Gore.



**It is 2114. What would
you tell humans living now?**

Don't let tech take over life. Have a balance in nature.
– Sonha

Help raise money to not cut down trees. – Mehgan

Money is made of trees. Leave nature alone unless your desire is to be one with it.
– Anonymous

Don't litter. Protect wild and endangered animals. – Anonymous

The Story of Interbeing: Interview with Charles Eisenstein

By Sister Jewel (Chan Chau Nghiem)

May 27, 2014

Charles Eisenstein

Charles Eisenstein is an author, public speaker, and self-described “degrowth activist.” He has written six books, including The Ascent of Humanity (2007), Sacred Economics (2011), and The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible (2013). In his latest book, he speaks of the old “Story” our civilization is built on, the “Story of Separation,” which has led to intense suffering, alienation, environmental degradation, and poverty. He writes, “The new Story of the People, then, is a Story of Interbeing, of reunion. In its personal expression, it proclaims our deep interdependency on other beings, not only for the sake of surviving but also even to exist. It knows that my being is part of your being. In its collective expression, the new story says the same thing about humanity’s role on Earth and relationship to the rest of nature. It is this story that unites us across so many areas of activism and healing. The more we act from it, the better able we are to create a world that reflects it. The more we act from Separation, the more we helplessly create more of that, too.”

Sister Jewel: A number of us in the Plum Village community have been reading your book, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know Is Possible*, and we really resonate with what you’re sharing. Several of us wonder what have been the main influences on your thinking. Are you an undercover Buddhist? Have you studied Thich Nhat Hanh’s teachings, or how did the term “interbeing” come to you?

Charles Eisenstein: I think the term “interbeing” has cropped up in a lot of places. I’d been using it for a while, and then someone told me that Thich Nhat Hanh coined the term, so I’ve been giving him credit for it. It’s in the atmosphere, because it’s just so true, and the time for that truth to be revealed to mass society is here.

It’s like in those French bakeries where they don’t need to add yeast to the dough, because the yeast is so ambient in the air that the dough gets quickened whether or not you add yeast to it. Many people, even without doing a whole lot of study and reading, are coming to the same kinds of conclusions and perceptions about the world as I am.

I was influenced early on by Wendell Berry, E. F. Schumacher, Rachel Carson. When I was twenty-two, I read Chögyam Trungpa’s

Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism, which saved me a lot of time—short-circuited the journey through spiritual ego. I lived in Taiwan for nine years, where Buddhism and Taoism were in the air. If I were a closet anything, I'd probably be a closet Taoist. But all of the religions in their esoteric expression are drawing from the same water table. And the water table is rising, and new springs are flowing.

SJ: I appreciate what you have shared about non-doing, and that if we don't know what to do, the best thing is to be still and let our inspiration, our insight come from quiet non-action. You've also shared that our feeling of urgency is a manifestation of scarcity, and it's another arm of the "Story of Separation." I'm wondering if you would say that many of our global problems would be solved by more people learning to stop the constant busyness and doing, and to find ease and connection with themselves, with people, with the Earth. That it's as much an inner journey of peacemaking, of reconciliation, as an outer one.

CE: I think it's both. So much of our politics is stuck in patterns of response that aren't working. When student performance is declining in schools, we implement more controls, more testing, more "accountability," more rigor. And then it doesn't work. So we respond by applying even more of those things, from security systems to control of students' behavior through pharmaceutical drugs. That's a situation in which doing is only making things worse. It doesn't mean that there isn't something else that we could do, but how do you get to that something else? You may have to go through a phase of de-programming, letting go of old habits, coming to stillness, before you can even see what the pattern of action was, and what alternatives there might be.

I'm not prescribing non-doing as a universal response to our problems. Sometimes it's the opposite. Sometimes, something obviously needs to be done, but we're afraid to do it. And we retreat into a spiritual or meditative state that we fancy up by calling it mindfulness, but really it's an unhealthy detachment and a shrinking back from life.

But culturally, it's much more common to be trapped in habits of reaction, whether on a systemic level or on a personal level. That's where the non-doing comes in, which is something that we don't really have room for. When we do it, we do it in a guilty way. I think that it's something we need to embrace as part of the creative process.

Beyond Duality: Activist Work, Spiritual Work

SJ: You speak about the need to hold both approaches, actively ready to respond with this inner transformation, as well as externally with activism in the world. I'm interested in this changing of habits, which needs to happen individually and collectively, and the idea that it's really about changing our fundamental story of how things work. That feels like deeply spiritual, psychological work. But I don't want to jump into

dualism. Could you speak to how to hold the two, and where the changing of habits comes from?

CE: This duality between inner transformational work and work in the world comes, in part, from an understanding of self in which there is a clear distinction between what's internal and what's external. But from the understanding of interbeing, that dualistic understanding of self versus other begins to fall apart—and along with it, falls apart the distinction between inner transformational work and work in the world.

When you understand that everything happening in the world mirrors something that's happening in yourself, then you can work on the self by working on the external manifestation of that thing in the world. And in fact, there may be no other way. You can sit in meditation for a long time and be blind to huge wounds in yourself, and it's only when you're engaging with the world that the wounds become visible, externalized.

It's not like activist work is a nice add-on to what's really important, the spiritual work. The two are inseparable and it goes both ways. Many people are hardcore activists for decades, and they encounter burnout, futility, or a feeling of imbalance. Sometimes they need to go so far as to drop their activism and go on a spiritual journey. They're realizing that all the stuff they're trying to change in the world isn't just out there in the world. It's in them, too. And as long as they're blind to what's in them, they're going to continually re-create it in all that they do.

SJ: In engaged Buddhism, we have retreats for activists. Thich Nhat Hanh has said our particular community has much to offer the work of social transformation through providing a place for activists to refresh themselves so they can continue to do their work. Many readers of this magazine are activists, but we are a community because of our spiritual practice—that's our focus, our strength. I wonder what you might say to those who are focused on their spiritual practice.

CE: As a starting point, I would ask: What is a spiritual practice? For one thing, what are you practicing for? Why is it called a practice? What are you practicing? And the second thing is, what does "spiritual" mean? So, both words: "spiritual," "practice." What do you really mean by that?

The word "spiritual" normally means something that's distinct from the fleshly or the material. It's not of the world. But that version of spirituality is bankrupt today. It had its use when the program of science divested matter from the qualities that we would describe as spiritual—the qualities of a self, or of a being. When science divested the world of those qualities and made it into just a thing, rather than a self, it gave us license to treat it as just a thing, and not as something sacred, conscious, alive, intelligent. So this is tied into the whole trajectory of our civilization.

But now, that understanding of world-as-thing, as purposeless, mundane, profane, etc.—that understanding is falling apart, both because it's practically not working anymore—it's creating a crisis



Deer Park Monastery, 2013

photo by Dzung Vo

**Part of the old story
is conquering nature,
conquering the self,
conquering the inner nature,
conquering the inner wild.**

**So I instead ask: What makes
me feel alive? What is the
expression of my inner wild?**

that's becoming harder and harder to ignore, and climate change is one example of that—and it's also breaking down from within science. The discoveries of the last couple decades are showing that properties of a self do actually inhere in matter, that matter seems to have properties of self-organization and life, even intelligence, consciousness. I can't say that science has proved these things, but it at least suggests the possibility. As we re-invest the world with sacredness, "spiritual" comes to mean something very different. If only a human being has these qualities, then spiritual work is inner. It's all about your own consciousness. But that's no longer the case. This dualism is falling apart.

You could conceive spirituality as the study of the immeasurable, of the qualitative. But that's very different from the way we typically use the word. A spiritual person, in the popular conception, is somebody who's kind of aloof from the world, introspective, meditating, communing with non-material beings. That's the spiritual realm, and we elevate it above the material realm. What's more worthy, what's more admirable? Who's the one who has done this hard work on the self, and has done a lot of "practice"? That's the spiritual person. Even if we profess to be non-judgmental, there's an inherent judgmentality and hierarchy in which the spiritual person, the conscious person, the mindful person, is more developed than the typical truck driver or waitress or heroin addict. This is a red flag, another problem built into the concept of spirituality that

I think we need to examine. I'm not saying that there isn't some axis of human development along which one progresses through the pursuit of what we call spiritual practices. But it's not the only axis of development.

The truth is that every person you meet is in some way more developed than you are, and that the multiple modes of development that a human being can pursue require the whole of humanity to pursue. We're in this together. Enlightenment is a collective effort, and that's why you have a Sangha, maybe. Once you accept that, then you can say, what particular mode of development are we drawn to (without valorizing it beyond some other mode of development)? What gifts do we have? What are we offering, in humility, to the rest of the world?

SJ: Right, like one fruit in a fruit salad.

CE: Right.

A Change of Heart

SJ: The spiritual practice in the Plum Village tradition is about transforming ourselves and the world. Those are very much the same thing. And that can only happen through a collective awakening, as you shared. Where do you see us on that journey? Where do we need to put our energy—particularly in terms of important things people need to be doing, in response

There was that pond that you visited when you were a child, and there were frogs and turtles. You go back there and it's dead now. The forest you went to, now there are bulldozers, now it's a strip mall. These experiences of beauty followed by grief affect us more than learning that CO₂ levels are now 400 parts per million.

to climate change? And how can we help more people arrive at this understanding? How can we support more of us to awaken?

CE: I'll start with where we are right now. The map that I'll use is this birthing process, this kind of profound transition that we're going through, where the old narratives, the old story, the old mythology is wearing thin, beginning to fall apart. And as it does so, people hold on to it even more tightly. They haven't let go and won't let go until it becomes simply impossible to hold on to it anymore. And we're nearing that time, but not yet. Right now you can still pretend everything's normal, even though it's greatly hollowed out.

Narratives that were taken for granted when I was a kid—for example, the triumphalist view of technology—are still there, but they don't have the same depth and fervor anymore. Even the makers of the propaganda don't fully believe the propaganda. The surface structures are more frozen than they ever were, but the core is hollowing out, and it's becoming very fragile. People don't believe in the system anymore. But they're still going along with it because, one, they don't know what else is possible, they don't even know anything else is possible. Secondly, everybody else is doing it. So they go through the motions.

What can we do to change that? We can make it easier for people to let go. A lot of our political discourse, even as environmentalists, has the opposite effect. The narrative of blame, of trying to guilt people into changing, bribe them psychologically into changing, scare them into changing—those things make people more defensive and make them grab on even more tightly to the story of “everything's fine, the scientists will find an answer, it can't be that bad.” People grab on to those enabling delusions more tightly when threatened.

What makes you care about nature, about the planet? Is it really that you're afraid of what's going to happen if you don't take care of it? Or is it that you actually love the planet, and regardless of your self-interest and regardless of its instrumental use to you, you want to take care of it?

I think people become environmentalists through experiences of beauty and grief. There was that pond that you visited when you were a child, and there were frogs and turtles. You go back there and it's dead now. The forest you went to, now there are bulldoz-

ers, now it's a strip mall. These experiences of beauty followed by grief affect us more than learning that CO₂ levels are now 400 parts per million.

We have to create conditions where people feel safe to feel and to care. That goes against a lot of our programming about how to make something change in the world. Sure, sometimes you can pressure people into changing, you can force them, but the powers-that-be have more force than we do. I don't think we're going to win in a contest of force. I think we need to induce a change of heart. The narrative of “us versus them” is ultimately part of the problem. The perception that the way you solve a problem is by conquering evil—that's part of the problem. That's what we have to let go of.

Traditional activism, which is about overcoming the latest bad guy, isn't deep enough. It just brings us another version of the same.

Deeper than Divesting

SJ: In light of not using “us versus them,” I'm thinking about those in the Civil Rights movement. They did not have more force than those in power. They had a moral power, grounded in a spirit and a practice of interbeing. As Dr. King said, the aim was not to have victory over white people, but rather to transform their hearts and minds so that they would also become free in the process, creating a victory for everyone. It came about through the use of moral force—a belief that segregation and discrimination were wrong, and people were willing to put their lives on the line. And the international boycott of South African apartheid was a big “no” to a force of injustice. How do you, for instance, challenge fossil fuel companies that are responsible for so much environmental degradation and injustice?

CE: The Civil Rights movement was mostly a nonviolent movement. What made the movement successful was that people were willing to die for what they believed. They were willing to make personal sacrifices. And it wasn't force that won the day in South Africa. What are you communicating if you're confronting a power that has more force than you? If you are challenging them to a contest of force, setting the rules of the game as such, you're probably going to lose.

We can't change the fossil fuel companies' behavior in isolation from the rest of the industrial system. As long as they have

customers, they're going to continue to operate, whether or not we divest of their stock. However, divesting might be helpful in terms of disrupting the story that what these companies do is perfectly okay. This situation differs from apartheid in a key regard though: racial equality in South Africa was no threat whatsoever to capitalism as we know it. Ending the fossil fuel era is a much deeper change. I'm not sure if the same tactics will work.

Personally, even if I had money to invest I wouldn't invest it in oil companies—or their bankers, suppliers, customers ... really that means the whole stock market. I'm not opposed to divestment, but I think by itself it won't get very far, because it runs up against structural economic forces. The demand is still there, the fossil fuel infrastructure is still there. Where I would like to see our political energy go is to stop ecocide on a local and bioregional level. Each new energy project involves horrible abuse of mountaintops, groundwater, forests, etc., because all the easy resources have already been extracted.

SJ: And what about when a lot of people divest, or target one company?

CE: Are you going to divest in the banks and pension funds? Plenty of people are willing to invest in stock of those companies. You can argue that when a lot of people divest, it makes the stock price artificially low, which makes their price-to-earnings ratio more favorable, which makes it a better investment for the people who don't give a damn—and is it really going to change corporate behavior? It begins to create a climate of opinion, but when that climate of opinion is antagonistic, the result might be that the corporate executives will retreat even more into their own self-justifying narratives. I'm not convinced that it's in fact a strategy.

I am certainly not proposing that we wait passively for the people in power to change their minds. I think we need to be confrontational, to expose the truth in ways that are uncomfortable and that, yes, require courage. What I caution against is using hateful rhetoric to inspire action, and I see a lot of that today. We must understand that when we propagate a narrative of “the people in power are doing awful things because they are awful people,” we divert energy for systems change onto these demonized individuals, thereby enabling and perpetuating the system. Even worse, we strengthen the underlying field of hatred, dehumanization, and conquest. It certainly doesn't engage what allows people to do courageous things and to commit deeply, which is the experience of beauty, love, grief.

The Interpersonal Js Political

SJ: How do we support people to have this experience of beauty and grief? What's your experience of how to create that deeper, more inner turn towards being in touch with what they love about this planet?

CE: One way is to provide actual experiences in nature, and to share, “Here's what moves me, here's what hurts me.” The less blame you infuse it with, the more able people will be to hear.

2014

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What is a spiritual practice? For one thing, what are you practicing for? Why is it called a practice?

On a deeper level still, you could ask: Why are people attracted to narratives that justify the terrible things that we're doing to the planet? Why are people attracted to narratives of control and fear and hunting down the terrorists, and this uncaring attitude toward nature? These come from what I call the perceptions of separation and the experience of separation, the experience of alienation, the experience of scarcity and anxiety and competition, and a world in which everybody is out for themselves and nobody cares.

Sometimes people will have a heart attack or some devastating personal loss, and after that, their political views change completely, and their behavior changes completely. It's not because somebody persuaded them to look at the graph on CO₂ and temperature, and they finally saw the evidence and were persuaded. Something else changed that allowed them to see and to hear. What is that something else? How can we cultivate that in people without them having to go through a heart attack?

It could be to give them experiences of unconditional love or forgiveness or generosity. Humor, camaraderie, fellowship. This is yet another confluence of the activist and the spiritual. The interpersonal things we do change the substructure of our systems. They are political.

Based on their calculable results, none of our actions are going to have much effect. How much of an effect is it going to be for you, singly, to divest? Or to write letters to your pension fund to divest? Or to be in a protest? You, one person, more or less, doesn't matter. It is important to engage in protest and resistance, and we have to have another reason to do these things, aside from the calculable utility. For me, such reasons include: because I feel more alive doing it, because I like to align my energy and resources toward that which is beautiful to me, because I know that all actions have cosmic significance and that any act of love or compassion or service strengthens the field of those things.

Maybe that brings us back to non-doing. Stepping back. Processing where we've been, digesting it, integrating it. And then from the empty space, new and imaginative actions can arise.

SJ: And making it fun! We have a Wake Up Sangha of young adults, and they organize flash mob sitting meditations in public places all over the world. That relates with what you said about helping people touch experiences of forgiveness, of unconditional love, of togetherness, of belonging.

You speak so beautifully in the book on the importance of joy and inspiring people, not with guilt, but to celebrate life. Do you have ideas for creating this new paradigm with joy, with de-

light? What kind of personal and collective ways do you engage in to bring in this new story of interbeing with humor and happiness?

CE: Everybody has different ways to bring joy to others, and I think you can only do that to the extent that you're a joyful person yourself. Part of it is embracing and validating what makes you joyful.

A woman recently told me a story about her descent into chronic fatigue. She was sleeping sixteen, eighteen hours a day, and feeling more tired when she woke up than when she went to bed. Sometimes she was unable to even lift her arm—that is how fatigued she was. She really wanted to go to a workshop, but she thought, "I can't go, I'm too fatigued! I'll never be able to make it through." But she went anyway. And when she was there, she felt much less tired. So she decided, "Maybe if I continue to follow what I really want to do at all times, I will feel less tired." This was her spiritual practice—to only do the things that she wanted to, and to not make choices based on anything else. That is an embracing of pleasure, of joy, of good feelings.

Traditional spirituality often made those the things to overcome. It said you couldn't just indulge in your desires; that would be selfish. Anyone who has been in a spiritual community recognizes the dangers of this kind of joyless spirituality, where everything is somber and heavy and serious. We recognize that as kind of a trap, a false path.

I can't give a formula for how to spread joy, but I know that the source of the joy is one's own joy, and that that is not distinct from pleasure and fulfillment of desires. Part of the old story is conquering nature, conquering the self, conquering the inner nature, conquering the inner wild. So I instead ask: What makes me feel alive? What is the expression of my inner wild? What would really feel good? What if what makes me feel alive leads me toward the deeper joys, which are found in generosity and service, in creating things that are beautiful to me? Maybe the world needs more of that. How many petroleum company executives are doing their work because it's beautiful to them? Not very many, I bet.

SJ: The idea about story is key here. Shifting the story has an effect immediately on your body, on your mind. The need to create ways for ourselves and for others to have access to new stories is also part of the joy, because you see this light go on, you see this relief, this falling away of tension and stress, as people realize, "Oh, I don't have to believe this."

CE: That gives me tremendous joy when I'm speaking to an audience, and I see that expression of, "Ohhh! Wow!" There are tears in their eyes, and this recognition. That gives me joy.

To find out more about Charles Eisenstein's work, visit: charleseisenstein.net.



*Transcribed by Greg Sever
Edited by Sister Jewel (Chan Chau Nghiem)
and Natascha Bruckner*



Volunteer gardeners, Wisconsin

photos by Heather Lyn Mann

“After years of working in conservation and running large programmes that attempted to halt destruction, I find myself in despair about the hopelessness of the task ahead, the lack of care, the ineffectiveness, and the failure. For the first time in my life, I am overwhelmed and despondent about the future and any ability to effect change. After years of feeling driven and energetic, I find myself without vocation and helpless.”

These words rise from my in-box and wrap my heart. The plainspoken account of the author’s pain opens old wounds, stirs compassion; I could have written the sentences myself once. But today, my stability and joy are steadied by years of mindfulness practice. I am able to see the writing not as a single cry from the wilderness but one of ten thousand voices from battle-weary advocates pummeled repeatedly by suffering. Climate change, ocean acidification, racism, a broken criminal justice system, poverty, slavery, war, and other forms of societal abuse increase the anguish of advocates. An intimate familiarity with this special brand of hurt, the insight of transformation, and a yearning to support those engaged in environmental and social healing led me this past spring to organize a Community of Mindful Advocacy.

Our community is a small collaboration of individuals from across the United States embodying both Buddhist leadership and lives of societal engagement. Each of us leads retreats and workshops on Mindful Advocacy and other topics; we also roll up our sleeves and work on the front line of suffering in our communities. We come together to take refuge in each other’s passion, wisdom, and friendship. United, we work to identify, develop, and test spiritual practices to enhance our own happiness and effectiveness, as well as that of others seeking environmental and social well-being. We do this work because it is our experience that traditional activism is often driven by anger and fear and advanced by strategies birthed in dualistic thought.

Our group is a blend of Buddhist traditions. Mary Aubry is a graduate of the Community Dharma Leaders Program of Spirit Rock in the Vipassana tradition. Anne Forbes is a graduate of the Three Doors Academy, a secular organization with roots in the Bön Buddhist tradition. Lorri Houston, Laura Hunter, and I are ordained members of the Order of Interbeing, a blend of Mahayana, Source, and Schools Buddhism; Chris Petit is an OI aspirant. Several of our Dharma teachers participate as ad-hoc advisors to the effort. By uniting diverse traditions, we aim to deepen understanding and find common language to more effectively serve those who seek to learn with us.

What Is Mindful Advocacy?

While our community reflects many traditions, I see Thich Nhat Hanh as the ideal Mindful Advocate. Inspired by Wake Up Schools initiative, I challenge myself to translate Thay’s teachings into loving and peaceful actions that are both spiritual and secular in nature, making the fruit of this effort accessible to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

Happy Advocates Will Heal the World

By Heather Lyn Mann



Public park volunteer, Wisconsin

Our teacher says insight begins when we accept suffering as the reality of now. When we deny *what is* and cling to a vision of a world different from the reality of now, we experience pain. Healing begins at the moment of acceptance. Mindful Advocates welcome reality; we train ourselves to breathe in suffering, experience it fully, and accept strong emotions as vital information. We then

breathe out compassion for ourselves and others. If we forget to breathe mindfully and are swept into frustration and anger, we block wisdom and energy, create disharmony, and injure relationships. Alternatively, if we stay steady and attentive to our breathing, we can lovingly care for Mother Earth and her children with the skill and lucidness of doctors.

It is important that we prepare ourselves for the death of the world. If society is past the tipping point and life as we know it is doomed, then it is crucial that Mindful Advocates ease suffering with loving skill, like tender-hearted hospice workers. Only by accepting our loved one's impermanence can we calmly bear witness to the beauty not even death can extinguish.

Acceptance does not mean Mindful Advocacy is passive. Warriors for justice exercise fierce compassion as we—without anger or hatred—prevent individuals from profiting from the suffering of others. This understanding stems from Thay's Second Mindfulness Training. We are determined to do everything in our power to *stop harm* through nonviolent, holding actions—even if this means putting ourselves at risk. Then, looking deeply, we find ways to transform the root causes and conditions of degradation and inequity so opportunities to profit from another's suffering no longer manifest in society. We seek not to fix problems but to transform them at the base with skillful means, loving kindness, and compassion.

In my twenty years working as an environmental advocate, I came to see wanting to change the world as a weak aspiration; instead, we must devote ourselves to justice. Too often, "Change!" is a battle cry for people fighting to restore or sustain entitlements or to maintain privilege. Justice addresses the needs of the voiceless and marginalized. As my friend and Zen Dharma teacher Kyodo Williams points out, justice provides for everyone's safety, self-determination, and survival. I think "Justice" is the name of the raft carrying all beings to the other shore. Our commitment to the welfare of the whole—without discrimination—is reflected in the Community of Mindful Advocacy's motto: "Where peace, compassion, and justice are the way and the aim."

The motto also hints at methodologies different from traditional activism. Mindful Advocates do not exercise power over others, collect wealth, or seek to amass institutional stability or structure. While Mindful Advocates stay informed, we do not exploit science to indoctrinate others to our point of view, to fear what we fear and act as we act.

Instead, Mindful Advocates embrace diversity and learn from different points of view. We practice the middle way—through deep listening, loving speech, and skillful action—and wake others to their nature using strategies that create true happiness. Our methods promote self-care and nourish allies and opponents alike. They encourages us to consider the aspirations of our ancestors and the claims of future generations so that we may grow skillful in creating lasting benefits to people, animals, plants, and minerals. Finally, as Thay's brother the Reverend Martin Luther

King Jr. prescribed, we prepare for nonviolent action with self-purification; we live simple, ethical, and joy-filled lives and invite others to do the same.

Why Emphasize Mindfulness?

In my experience, mindfulness is a powerful skill that cuts through misconceptions and clarifies my relationship to the world. It effectively releases anger, fear, craving, and the delusion of my "self" as separate from others. Secular mindfulness exercises, when practiced by individuals or organizations, or in a community of change agents, stakeholders, clients, and those thought to be "issue opponents," can wake people to a shared ethic and to their interdependency. It can help them to let go of rigid views and fixed outcomes. Through mindfulness, we discover a long-term perspective and find fresh ways to extend compassion and generosity to each other and future beings.

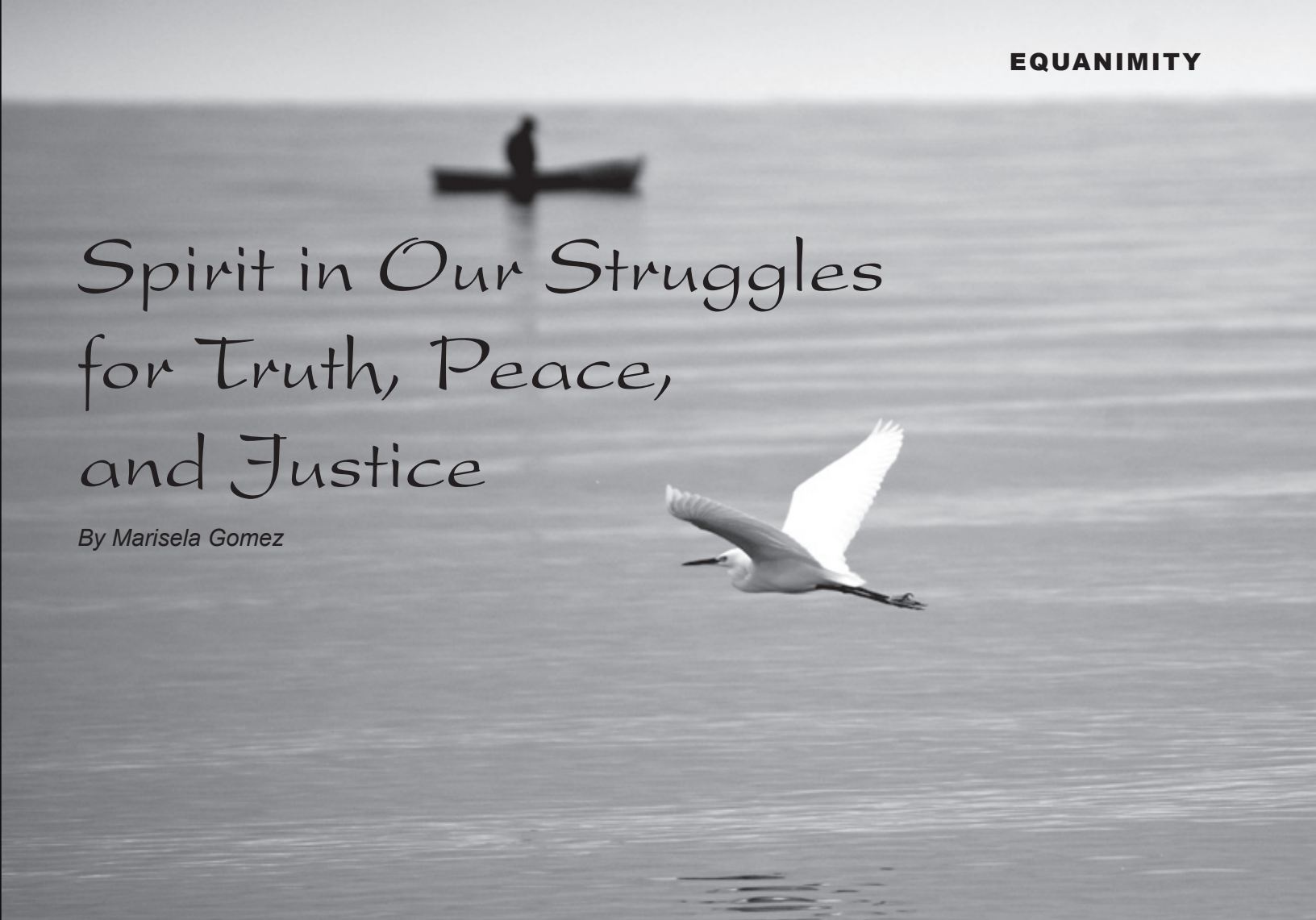
How Can You Get Involved?

Our Community of Mindful Advocacy is starting an online dialogue, and we'd love to hear from advocates of all stripes: environmental and social activists, resource managers, farmers, gardeners, chefs, educators, child advocates, animal rights activists, patient and health care advocates, immigrant rights activists, lawyers, politicians, business leaders, volunteers, engaged spiritual practitioners, and other concerned citizens. Visit www.MindfulAdvocacy.org, an online café for Dharma sharing, where friends and colleagues explore loving and peaceful action. Read and comment on ideas being discussed. Write us at mindfuladvocacy@gmail.com. Describe the practice methods that help you maintain joy and the ways you get spiritually bogged down in your effort to transcend day-to-day injustices. We'll post your stories of success or struggle and share your questions.

Finally, consider creating your own Community of Mindful Advocacy, a gathering of friends where you can find healing refuge; then let us know you've organized so we can be "Sister Sanghas." There is a clear and nourishing path of loving, peaceful, and mindful advocacy. The way is joyous. Let us go as a river. 🍃

Heather Lyn Mann, True Lotus Peace, consulted with the Trust for Public Land, then founded the nonprofit Center for Resilient Cities (ResilientCities.org) and served as its director for a dozen years. Heather newly launched the Community of Mindful Advocacy (MindfulAdvocacy.org) and blogs about a spiritual response to the climate emergency at www.HeatherLynMann.com.





Spirit in Our Struggles for Truth, Peace, and Justice

By Marisela Gomez

photo by Marisela Gomez

It is important to bring spirituality more intentionally into our struggles for truth, peace, and justice, as this grounds our social movements in the strength of our collective humanity, bridges our struggles across identity politics, enhances our clarity in decision making, and sustains our energy and joy.

"A Love Ethic"

When we look at some of the photos and video images of the Civil Rights Movement, listen to and read some of the history, we glimpse or touch the spirit of the movement. One image [shown on p. 34] is embedded deeply in my consciousness. It is a scene in a church where congregants are listening to a sermon encouraging solidarity and nonviolence during the violent backlash against a group of people who were demanding justice and freedom in 1963. The looks on the faces show a deep level of comfort, touching a place of refuge that goes beyond words or actions and offering strength from which perseverance was sustained in the struggle. This movement nurtured a spirit that grew a collective compassion, humanity, and nonviolence. This powerful base has been missing in current struggles for justice and truth.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. eloquently preached and practiced bringing the spirit of love into our social movements. He devoted himself to transforming racial and economic injustice and knew this was only possible and sustainable through the practice of love. His goal and ultimate aim was to create the "beloved community," in which brotherhood and reconciliation could blossom. Today revolutionary activists such as bell hooks continue Dr. King's message: "When love is the ground of our being, a love ethic shapes our participation in politics."¹ She names the spirit needed for justice in all oppressions as the reason for her work: "To me, all the work I do is built on a foundation of loving-kindness. Love illuminates matters. And when I write provocative social and cultural criticism that causes readers to stretch their minds, to think beyond set paradigms, I think of that work as love in action. While it may challenge, disturb and at times even frighten or enrage readers, love is always the place where I begin and end."²

In these times of grave economic inequities, it is important for activists for peace to articulate, practice, and encourage the practice of love and compassion. When we assure respect, understanding, tolerance of differences, and trust in ourselves, we embody the



New Pilgrim Baptist Church, September 17, 1963, during a sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

© 1976 Matt Herron/Take Stock

values we want to see in society. Without understanding, conflict escalates and revenge waters the seed of retaliation, nurturing the cycle of violence and oppression in ourselves and the other. But with the practice of love and understanding, we step on the path of healing our conflicts, through deep listening and loving speech, through reconciliation and beginning anew, our spiritual practice. We begin to recognize the strength of a collective spirit grounded in peace, forgiveness, and cooperation, which nurtures the same qualities in us, the first step in our struggles for peace and justice.

As the director of a community organization (Save Middle East Action Committee, SMEAC) challenging the displacement of low-income and African American people in Baltimore, part of my work was to encourage residents to listen to what was being said and what was not being said by those forcing them to move. In the midst of not knowing where you will live in six months or whether your child will attend the same or a different school next semester, it becomes difficult to listen with an open heart to what a developer who wants your land is saying. But it was only when we could let them speak their truth that we could understand the perceptions they had of the other. This helped us to build a campaign that highlighted the racism, classism, greed, and injustice of the developers and win support for residents: love in action for justice.

Bridging across Identity Politics

During many years as a peace and justice activist, I have witnessed how our individual struggles for justice are separated into different identity politics which may include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status, disabilities, religious choice, age, health and human rights, language, and environmental sustain-

ability. Involved in any one struggle, we may find ourselves diminishing the struggle of other groups, competing with each other for perceived limited resources, and oppressing another group while we struggle to dismantle our chosen oppression. For example, we may oppress women while we challenge racial inequality, or we diminish the role of racial oppression as we struggle for class equity, or demean homosexuals while opposing injustices against immigrants. We do this unknowingly and sometimes knowingly as we move through our busy lives feeling confident that our chosen struggle is the most important one.

My experience participating with different struggles for justice is that each struggle can be largely disconnected from the others. I remember at one time being engaged with at least three different activist groups, each somewhat unaware of the importance of the issues of the others. We too easily forget our common humanity, our love, which motivated us to seek for justice, truth, and peace in the first place. While in our hearts and minds we believe in these values for ourselves, in our fast-paced lives we forget the struggles of others. When we fail to remember and stay connected with other oppressed groups, we become alienated from our brothers and sisters in their struggles for justice. We remain disconnected from the shared humanity of all oppressed people and can become the “oppressor” that we challenge in our own struggles for justice. We are also weakened as seekers of truth by this lack of awareness and love, and contradict the intention of justice and peace for all. We forget that we both benefit from privilege and suffer from deprivation throughout different moments of our lives.

As an overeducated woman of color in a racist society, I walk daily with and without privilege. Driving while black in Baltimore one night in the wrong neighborhood, being pulled over by the police, dragged out of my car, thrown to the ground and searched,

This helped us to build a campaign that highlighted the racism, classism, greed, and injustice of the developers and win support for residents: love in action for justice.

while my car was searched for drugs without my permission, reminded me that no amount of education removes the perceptions of what skin color means in society and how this is manifested in institutional, cultural, and individual ways. This was an experiment of recognizing the limits of my class privilege, trumped by color. Similarly, I am aware that degrees of higher education have allowed me access to benefits, such as this spiritual path that I am currently on. Having the time to go to retreats, find and nourish spaces of healing, requires time and money. Many low-income people have neither.

Forces of oppression intentionally create disconnection and separation. We need a spiritual practice that respects all struggles, recognizing our shared dehumanization, and knows that freedom for one group enhances freedom for all. Seeing that our struggles are interwoven immediately brings us strength as we feel connected to a larger group. The awareness of this spiritual base of connection across different political identities and justice struggles—if built and maintained as a driving force in our daily struggles—can become the matrix or net of power capable of overcoming all oppressions. Such a powerful matrix of spiritual connectedness helps to remind each struggle of the importance and value of the others. Building such a network connects the spirit of our struggles, the truth of our struggles, the justice of our struggles, as part of a peaceful whole. It reasserts the greater wholeness of all humanity that exists beneath the social construct of identity politics.

Enhancing Our Clarity, Sustaining Our Energy, Bringing Joy

When I feel grounded and connected to something bigger than myself, I have more energy and clarity. This clarity allows for decision making that is more wise and insightful. I am less likely to make decisions quickly from a place of insecurity or a threatened ego, because I feel connected to something larger than myself. When I feel connected, I can let go of feeling personally attacked and am more likely to view a situation objectively. I have more patience to listen deeply and am more likely to speak and act in a way that is truly helpful. The lack of joy in our struggles also creates acute and chronic fatigue. Joy nourishes our minds and bodies and brings a sense of comfort and ease. When we feel whole and that we belong, we naturally feel joy.

The struggle of SMEAC was violent and filled with anger on both sides because politicians and developers assumed they could remove people from their land without their permission and residents resisted this violation of their human right to participate fully in their community because of development and displacement. This energy continuously challenged and slowly diminished the spaces where we could find peace, calm, and joy. Daily it sapped

our ability to offer spaciousness to each other and our opponents. However, when we gathered together and shared stories, a smile, and our understanding with each other, we healed, we became energized, and we shared joy. We would spend equal amounts of time sharing after formal meetings, debriefing what was said and not said. This sharing would de-escalate the anger felt from meetings with developers, allow us to assure each other that we were there for each other, and solidify the understanding that we were in this together. Our spirits would lift and we would eventually head our separate ways, now warriors with a plan and a little more energy to continue the struggle, sometimes with laughter and often with a smile. There were never enough of these moments to balance the challenges, but they were sufficient to sustain our struggle in the short term.

These times fortified us for the other, more challenging moments that would physically and mentally tire us. I experienced viscerally how feeling part of a larger collective matrix for justice enhanced my effectiveness, nourished my body and spirit, and brought joy. As in Maya Angelou's epic poem, "Still I Rise," grounded in spirituality, truth, forgiveness, compassion, love, connection, and understanding, our struggles for justice rise together. 🌱

1 *Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love*, bell hooks, *Shambhala Sun*, July 2006.

2 *Building a Community of Love: bell hooks and Thich Nhat Hanh*. bell hooks. *Shambhala Sun*, January 2000.

Marisela Gomez is a mindfulness practitioner, public health scholar activist, and physician. Of Afro-Latina ancestry, she has spent more than twenty years in Baltimore involved in social justice activism and social determinants of health research, writing, and practice.

She was first exposed to meditation and Buddhism through Being Peace in 1991 but it was not until 2002, after taking the time to begin a regular practice of meditation, that she touched a deeper understanding of what she had been studying from books and teachings. Since then she has been studying and practicing mindfulness and other forms of meditation, in community, at Buddhist practice centers in the US, Nepal, Malaysia, Thailand, and France.





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How Can Our Babies Help Heal the World?

By Robyn Sheldon

Romy made just the tiniest one-second greeting when she was born, a sweet cooing sound, and then she snuggled onto her mother's tummy, into that soft bowl that minutes before had been a tautly stretched pregnant belly. She snuffled on her hand and gazed around the room in what seemed like awe. She looked at me, at the midwife, at the walls, but most of all at her parents. She listened to their soft murmurings as they smiled and welcomed her into their world. For a full hour she remained alert and silent as she happily squirmed her way up from Anna's belly to find her own way to the breast. Finally she fell into a contented slumber with her mother's nipple resting gently in her mouth.

Anna and I had done a few Soul Integration sessions for helping her develop a deeper connection to Romy whilst she was still in the womb. During the sessions parents employ active

imagination whilst in a relaxed state of consciousness, to build an intimate bond with their babies. I was also present as a doula¹ at Anna's labor to remind her that she and Romy were undertaking this journey together.

Anna wrote to me ten days after the birth. "During my active labour I was able to hold the connection with my little girl because I had such a clear open connection. My whole labour experience felt rural, natural, and very intense. I didn't question anything in my mind that is otherwise very quick in having that little doubting question waiting somewhere. It felt like I was empowered through the session and work I had done to trust in the process and to trust in my unborn child that we are doing this journey together... It was like a firework in every cell of my body when she arrived and she was lying completely relaxed on me, and our skin touched and our eyes met. It was completely calm. And she really felt safe to take her time to see, to feel and to take a breath. Meanwhile I had the feeling that our soul connection was like a roller coaster of neurons sharing love, joy, and life, and all sorts of other information that I can't put into words, as it feels like something that one can't put into words."

At the First Dawn

Yet this is not the way that many babies are allowed to experience birth. Nils Bergman is a doctor who specializes in doing research on Kangaroo Mother Care, a method of caring for newborns, and on the immense psychological impact that those first few hours after birth have on a newborn's psyche. He explains what happens on a neuro-physiological level to a baby that does not develop this connection to its mother, usually because it has been physically removed from her:

When mother is absent, the newborn brain feels unsafe, it perceives danger and threat to life, and its basic needs are not provided. The brain kicks in a powerful defense reaction, which first makes a short burst of

crying before shutting that down and lowering heart rate and temperature, and then shuts down all activity, reverting to the immobilization defense, similar to that of frogs and reptiles. This looks like sleep! But it is not, and it is maintained by high levels of cortisol (the stress hormone).

Mother's presence is necessary for the baby to feel SAFE ... her absence is UNSAFE. ... There is an immediate reaction of crying, or protest, that signals to the mother, "rescue me, pick me up, save me." When this does not happen, a deeper survival mechanism kicks in, based on the logic that the mother who does NOT pick up the baby is probably in greater danger herself ... and so crying is endangering the mother and the baby, so baby stops crying. This defense response has many names, but "freeze" is often used to describe the high arousal state with immobilization. It cannot be maintained for long, because it lowers the heart rate, so the next stage is called "dissociation," the baby tunes out and disconnects ... This can be kept up much longer ... until it is safe for mother to pick the baby up again. But the end result is (higher anxiety and) ... more difficulty in self-regulation.

There may also be long-term harm to the emotional and social intelligence. The baby quickly learns that not even mother can be trusted to meet its needs, the capacity to trust and to love is compromised. Emotional and social intelligence can be profoundly impacted. Obviously, not all separated children become asocial psychopaths ... but that our modern social fabric is fraying at the edges is evident by high teenage pregnancy, high divorce rates, and loss of the nuclear family.²

One cannot help but question what kind of societal impact this has on our communities, when almost no one is being trained in awareness of the newborn's highly receptive psyche at birth. It is rare in our clinical hospitals, which have done so much good in lowering infant and maternal mortality, to find doctors and midwives who are deeply conscious of the impact that birth has on the infant's hugely sensitive psyche, or for the birth team to dim the lights, lower their voices, or to focus on the importance of the first "golden hour" after birth for helping the baby feel welcomed and safe.

Frederick Leboyer, author of *Birth without Violence*, gives wonderful advice on how to remain emotionally open and aware through all of the magnificent turbulence of birth. He writes:

*Learn to respect this sacred moment of birth,
as fragile, as fleeting, as elusive as dawn. ...
The child is there, hesitant, tentative ...
Let him be.
Just wait.
This child is awakening*

*for the very first time.
This is his first dawn.
Allow him its grandeur, its majesty.
Don't even stir until he leaves behind
the night and its kingdom of dreams.*

Source of Disconnection

Babies learn about who they are and how they fit into the world by "tuning in" to the overtones and undertones in the atmosphere created by their parents and caregivers. Often parents, despite loving their babies deeply, allow for the hospital staff to take them away and interfere with bonding because it is the "way things are done here." Babies are cleaned up, wrapped up, and placed nicely out of the way in nurseries, whilst the birth team are efficiently clearing up the messiness of the mother and of the birth to make space for the next arrival, almost as if babies come in on conveyor belts.

When we are forced to shut down emotionally to protect our tender hearts at birth, we become defensive, and a natural human reaction to defensiveness is hostility.

Michel Odent is an internationally acclaimed author, a doctor, an endocrinologist, and a natural birth advocate. In his book *The Scientification of Love*, he wonders "whether violence at birth contributes to a violent society." Perhaps our uncaring protocols of removing the baby from the parents immediately after birth, and of not noticing its sensitivity, might be a foundation for the harmful manner in which we treat one another and our Earth.

The lack of care we show for our planet comes from a source of deep disconnection. We disconnect from the Oneness consciousness out of which we all emerge (consider how, at birth, a baby doesn't know that his mother is not him until she is physically or emotionally removed from him). And we disconnect from the other beings around us, including the planet, when we allow our left brains to take on an authoritarian role over the more intuitive right brain (usually at about two years old when we start having tantrums). The left brain creates the orderliness and structure that help keep us feeling we have some sort of control over this haphazard and unreliable world we live in.

Even when we are giving birth to new life, or leaving life at death, we fight desperately to maintain control. Childbirth is a time when controlling our surroundings and attempting to force the intensity of the experience into something manageable illustrate how important letting go is to the business of living well. The more we resist and fight and fear the labour, the more it hurts. The more we soften and open to the experience, the more magnificent it becomes.

Trusting in Tenderness

When a client, Krista, was in early labour and her contractions were mild, she was experiencing such intense pain that she was weeping and desperate for pain relief. Once she let go and

allowed the sensation to be there, she relaxed with deep breathing and found some trust in her body. As she did so, her experience shifted dramatically; the contractions grew strong and powerful whilst she grew soft and wild and open. She murmured that labour was easy and she could continue for a long time. Half an hour later, her baby was born. Labour is no different than life, only more intense, and the same skills that enable us to be fully present without resistance in labour assist us to be fully present without resistance in our everyday experience. Settling into that place of stillness within allows for transformation. Trusting and letting go, we become wiser and more loving.

The tendency to remain in control at all costs is impacting severely on our societies and the Earth. We impose order on the land with monoculture and fertilizers and pesticides. We plunder our mineral resources to maintain the machinery of civilized society. We live in boxes with no access to the vibrant life force of nature because it is too unruly. This managing of our planet is becoming too much for it to bear. We all know that it is in deep distress.

The resolution of this crisis has to lie deep within our own psyches. We cannot respond to the pain of the Earth until we can tune in to the interbeing between us. In order to heal our psyches, we must return all the way back to the beginning, to the way we give birth and parent our children, before they have closed themselves down in defensiveness. Unless we can hold our own wounded little inner child or baby self with tenderness and deep listening,

we will be unable to overcome our defenses that create separation and hostility. As long as we remain defensive, we remain separate from the unifying consciousness from which we emerged. The only real way to take care of the Earth is to recognize that on a cellular and spiritual level, she is not separate from us.

It is time to start listening.



- 1 A doula is a professional non-medical person attending to the continuous emotional support of a woman in labour. Through soothing, reassuring, listening, and building confidence, a doula creates a safe space, which decreases the pain experienced.
- 2 For more information, visit: www.kangaroomothercare.com

Robyn Sheldon is a Soul Integration specialist, connecting individuals to their innermost resources. She lives in South Africa. The Soul Integration work around the birthing process is captured in her book, The Mama Bamba Way, which describes Robyn's birthing philosophies and brings her practice to thousands of parents across the world.



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Carbon Reduction in Oneself, Carbon Reduction in the World

By Will Stephens

Binley Farm

photos courtesy of Will Stephens

Reversing climate change seems a bit daunting, to say the least, but on further reflection we can see that it is possible. Our planet has the ability to absorb quite a lot of carbon dioxide and other warming gases—just not as much as we are producing! If we all just produce a lot less, then our Mother Earth will do the reversing process for us.

My journey to reduce my carbon footprint started in earnest when a visit to Plum Village in 2004 re-opened my eyes to the effects of my actions. I soon started working alongside various environmentalists, one of whom did a fantastic job of watering my positive carbon-cutting seeds. I had made a lot of money from entrepreneurial work, and when you have a lot of money, it's all too easy to consume a lot; and of course, the more you consume, the higher your carbon footprint. My good "carbon friend" asked me about my lifestyle and the changes I had gone through over the previous year. When he found out that I had cut down my carbon footprint by over ten percent within the year, he lit up and said how well I had done! He helped me to understand that we can't change our lifestyles overnight but just need to aim to reduce every





Dharma sharing at Binley Farm

year by a certain amount. Rather like with mindfulness practice, we can't look for transformation overnight—it takes time and diligence to effect change. "Carbon reduction in oneself, carbon reduction in the world!"

Even though I became more and more aware of the effect I was having on climate change, it was really hard to stop the consumption and live more lightly on the planet. It's hard to give all your money away when you have worked hard to earn it, so I was happy to eventually find a good solution. My family and I invested everything we had in an old farmhouse with land, renovating it in the most environmentally responsible way possible. Investing money in renewable energy, insulation, eco-improvements to your home, and sustainable ways of growing and harvesting food are win-win solutions, as you get the benefit for the planet, reduced living costs, and less available money to spend on high-carbon pursuits!

Now we live fairly lightly in a beautiful valley in Gloucestershire, UK, where we offer mindful living retreats to individuals, young adults, teachers, health care professionals, and business-people. All our water comes from the nearby spring and is heated by the sun or wood fires. All our space heating comes from burning wood, but we don't need much, as the houses are south facing and benefit from solar-passive gain, as well as being super insulated and airtight. We grow as many of our vegetables as possible and have chickens providing eggs for us. Right now we are enjoying home-grown peaches, raspberries, and salad! We have planted over

one thousand trees since we got here three years ago, for firewood, fruit, nuts, and of course just for the sake of planting trees. I have a commitment to myself to plant at least one tree every winter for the rest of my life.

I can definitely say that a low-carbon lifestyle is a more enjoyable lifestyle! Of course, I get the occasional craving for that new electric car or a holiday in the Carribean, and who knows—I might take the plunge if I save up enough for a carbon splurge!

Do come and stay with us on a retreat. To find out more, see www.binleyfarm.org.



Will Stephens, True Essential Truth, currently lives in Gloucestershire, England, with his wife, three children, chickens, bees, and other friends. Will worked as an entrepreneur in many areas before finding a new path that led him into environmental work, psychotherapy, mental health, prison work, stress reduction, heart-based living, and mindfulness.



A little while ago I watched *More Than Honey*, a documentary on the worldwide disappearance of the honeybee. The energy of compassion arose strongly within me as I learnt about the plight of the bees. Markus Imhoof, the director and one of the writers of the film, helped me see how a whole species has become the victim of the suffering of another species.

I find the bees to be an extraordinary wonder of nature. They work together with each one acting for the good of the whole; no one gives commands and yet everyone obeys. It is very easy to see the collective as a single organism with each bee behaving like a cell of that organism.

I was touched to see how the lives of these creatures are being manipulated to serve our needs, and now they are dying. Depending on the region, fifty to ninety percent of all local bees have disappeared in an epidemic that's spreading from beehive to beehive. The majority of bees globally require human-administered antibiotics to survive. In China, honeybees have completely disappeared and so pollination is done by hand, flower by flower. While scientists haven't identified the exact cause, the documentary reveals many possible causes: the stresses of being transported in trucks and planes, the pesticides we use in farming, new viruses and parasites, our intervening in their reproductive process, overbreeding, and so on. They suffer as a result of our actions, and they are not able to respond—they may not even know we are the cause. Who is there to speak up for them? According to the documentary, a third of our food supply is dependent on bees for pollination. As I eat fruits and vegetables, the bees are in me. By protecting the bees, I am protecting myself.

I am unhappy, I want to fill a void, I want to distract myself from dissatisfaction, and so I consume. Having worked as an investment analyst for fifteen years, covering a number of financial ecosystems, including retail and agriculture, I understand that most firms are primarily oriented towards maximising profits. They naturally look to satisfy the wants of their customers at the lowest possible cost. The result is the “industrialization” of other living beings, in this case the honeybees. From this perspective, the bees are the victims, the system is the conduit, and my suffering is the cause.

Once upon a time I would have watched this same documentary and found it fascinating; but at the end, I would have simply shrugged my shoulders and thought, oh well, there's not much I can do. But the seed of compassion is much stronger in me today, which I view as the result of practicing in the Plum Village tradition. I feel more connected to the bees, and an energy of wanting to help them naturally comes up.

When I looked into how I could help the bees, I realised that a transformation in me has been taking place as a result of the practice, the teachings, and being with friends who are on the path. The change is so slow it's not noticeable from week to week or even month to month. Yet, slowly but surely, my internal formations are shifting. I am now more aware of what I consume and the suffering that might be taking place as a result. It is difficult to see how shifting my consumption away from products that are dependent on the bees is possible, as they encompass so much of what I eat, especially as a vegetarian. I had the thought that the most effective way to offer my energies would be

For the Good of the Whole

Protecting the Honeybees

By Alipasha Razzaghipour



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to support others on the path of practice. As more people become aware and concerned about what is happening to the honeybees, the more pressure there will be to change the current system of exploitation that is endangering this precious species.

This energy of wishing to support others on the path has been growing in me for the past three or four years, with the plight of the bees further fueling it. One manifestation of this is Peaceful Presence (www.peacefulpresence.org), a site set up to support practice communities in the Plum Village tradition by sharing ideas and offering resources to those looking to start or develop groups. It is my hope that strengthening these communities will allow others to taste the fruits of practice, which in time will help the honeybees and all the other species on planet Earth.

Alipasha Razzaghipour, True Fluent Energy, founded Peaceful Presence in 2011. He lives in London and practices with the online groups Plumline Heart Sangha and Deep Looking Sangha, which he co-founded with Thuy Cu and Jan Mieszczanek in 2012 and 2014 respectively.





photo courtesy of New Energy Economy

Mindful Steps to Address Climate Change

By Nomi Green

In February of 2013, I was one of 40,000 people who met in Washington, D.C., during a cold and windy weekend to protest the Keystone XL pipeline. The pipeline is targeted to carry 830,000 gallons of tar sands oil a day from a beautiful, pristine, indigenous area of Alberta, Canada, to Port Arthur, Texas. NASA climate scientist James Hansen has stated that digging up the tar sands oil from this region “would be game over for the environment,” because large quantities of carbon would be released.

That evening, after we walked to the White House, a small group gathered to hear the stories of women who were taking action to stop the pipeline. First, we listened to indigenous women. They told of the suffering that their families, the animals, and the land are experiencing. Their children are sick and can’t breathe, as they develop asthma from the tar smoke. The traditional way of life is being destroyed: moose and fish have “cancers grow[ing] outside their bodies.” The women who spoke were brokenhearted. They said, “We don’t have time to grieve; every time we turn around they take something else.”

Next we heard from Texan women who live along the route of the pipeline and who are standing up to stop the project. One story in particular moved me. It was told by a very small, soft-spoken woman in her seventies. She talked about how her husband, who had recently died, had been an oil and gas man. When she was told the pipe would cross her property, she originally had no objection. As the builders began, however, she saw what little regard they had for the reclamation of the soil or for water runoff, which would cause erosion on her land. This caused her to reflect. Her concern grew; if the construction of the pipe itself was being done so recklessly, what would happen if there was a problem? She ultimately decided to oppose the pipe. She stood in front of a bulldozer to stop the construction on her land and was arrested for doing so.

Right Action

Something about hearing these stories caused my aspiration to grow. My deepest heart's desire is to lessen the suffering of climate change. With my volition clearly in mind, I began to ask myself, "What is right action for me?" I spent some months reflecting on this question. I wondered how the Buddha and Thay came to know what right actions to take in different situations.

In my youth I participated a number of times in nonviolent civil disobedience to stop the use of nuclear weapons and nuclear power. It was effective as a way to draw attention to that important issue. The lack of a significant worldwide response to climate change drew me to consider using nonviolence again. Is nonviolent civil disobedience right action, I wondered? I sat with this question for a very long time. What would Sangha wisdom tell me? When I have a question that lingers, I bring it to the Sangha, asking for the community's eyes to assist me in finding the answer. So, with this question in my heart, last summer I turned to Thay Phap Ho. He helped me look deeply within and ask myself what my right action might be. What qualities and skills did I already possess that would allow me to make a contribution that was right for me?

The Mindfulness Trainings

The first of our Five Mindfulness Trainings instructs us "to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals." The second training says that we will practice to not take "material resources from those who are in need," and also practice seeing that the "happiness and suffering of others is not separate from our own happiness and suffering." How do we live these words fully with all beings in mind?

One step I've taken is to begin training people in nonviolent civil disobedience. In this way, I can encourage and support others in taking a principled, peaceful stance for all life on our beautiful planet. In the last year I have trained three groups in northern New Mexico, with the objective of stopping the Keystone XL pipeline. We have created a small band of thirty-five climate champions who are committed to mindfully standing up for life.

Another step I'm pursuing is to peacefully stand in public places, reminding others of the necessity to act in ways that ensure

all beings have a chance to live. This is no small task, as currently it is estimated that three species become extinct each hour. Yet actions such as these, and those of all *bodhisattvas* who have gone before us—including Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi—have been extremely successful in making changes. In fact, during the last forty years there have been eighty-five peaceful, nonviolent revolutions around the world.

To avoid becoming driven and drained by the work to lessen suffering, I have to hold my aspiration lightly. I do my best to practice a middle path that walks between anger and attachment to views on one side, and despair on the other. To keep my freshness alive, I aspire to practice being aimless with my goal. I take each step because it is the right next step for me at that present moment, without holding tightly to any end result.

As an example, on a cold morning in May of this year, I stood outside the office of our local electric company as board members arrived to attend their annual meeting. I held a sign with a picture of young Native American children who live near the coal-fired power plant owned by this utility. The children are using inhalers to breathe. The asthma rates are very high in the area where they live, due to the pollution from coal smoke. As I stood on the street, my intention was to open the hearts of board members to the suffering of other beings whose lives might seem remote to them. And yet, I had to keep letting go, not knowing if my action would bear any fruit at all.

These practices have brought me deeper and deeper into the sacredness of our lives and the lives of all beings. In fact, the steps I am taking cause me to be more acutely aware of the preciousness and interconnectedness of all life.

In many ways, the volition toward right action has become my practice, a practice of interbeing. Daily I turn to the natural world to refresh myself, receiving solace from my time in nature. The abundance of refreshment that is available to me when I connect with Mother Earth gives me energy to continue taking small steps in gratitude to her. 🍃

Nomi Green, True Source of Virtue, lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and practices with the Desert Rain Sangha. She enjoys wandering in beautiful places on our precious planet, Mother Earth, the jewel of the cosmos.



Dinner Makes a Difference

By Eve Heidtmann

Global warming is hard to face. The challenge is so great and I feel so small. I tried denial but found I just couldn't keep it up for long. Finally I decided I had to take hold of some part of the problem and do something. The issue that most called out to me was food. I set out to learn about it and see what I could do.

Food is a huge contributor to global warming. Everything on my plate today comes not only from the sun, rain, and soil, but also from a long chain of people driving tractors and trucks, creating packages and running assembly lines. My dinner, simple as it is, has an impact on the Earth and on the future that lies ahead for all our children. It's one little dinner, one little impact, but I need to remember to multiply my impact by seven billion, the number of people on Earth who are or should be having supper tonight. Then I need to remember that we're all doing it again tomorrow, and the next day, and all the days to come. We ask so much of the Earth. Our collective impact is huge.

Endangering Ourselves

The impact of our farmed animals is also huge. For those of us who grew up reading stories about family farms where the animals were known by name, it can be hard to comprehend the scale of animal agriculture today. The concept of "farm" has changed into "factory" as the number of animals has grown exponentially. In the United States, the average layer-chicken operation now has



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614,000 birds. Hog farms and cattle feedlots hold animals in the tens of thousands. If you have access to the Internet, search for "cattle feedlots" and you will see photos of cattle in pens for as far as the eye can see. The average number of cows in "mega-dairies" now is almost 1,500. Because a dairy cow must produce a calf every twelve to fourteen months to keep the milk flowing, the dairies provide a constant supply of new animals for the beef cattle yards. The cow herself goes off to the slaughterhouse when her milk production declines. All these numbers add up: more than ten billion farmed animals are slaughtered every year in this country alone.

The production of livestock on this scale contributes greatly to climate change, causing at least eighteen percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Carbon comes from all the fossil fuels burned to grow and transport feed, transport animals to slaughter and run the machinery involved, and refrigerate, package, and transport the meat. Then there is methane, which has twenty-three times the warming power of carbon dioxide, and nitrous oxide, with 296 times that power, both of which come from the digestive processes and manure of farmed animals.

As all of these gases rise and trap heat in the atmosphere, they help push the climate to extremes, causing floods and droughts that make it ever harder to grow crops. The problem comes full circle: in the name of feeding ourselves, we are endangering our own food supply.

New Flavors, New Friends

So what am I to do about dinner? I've learned to question old habits and challenge myself to try something new. Reading *The China Study* by T. Colin Campbell convinced me that I could not only do without animal products, but I would be healthier if I did. I decided to check out vegan cookbooks from the library and see if I could imagine eating this kind of food. To my surprise, I was delighted with all the new flavors and quickly bonded with plant-based cooking.

In 2007, Thay gave a Dharma talk about livestock and global warming and asked us to try eating differently. Soon after I left the meditation hall in Deer Park that day, I had an




Mindful Cooking group potluck, Portland, Oregon

photo by Eve Heidtmann

idea. I got together with Sangha friends in Portland and we started The Joy of Mindful Cooking, a recipe-sharing project to help each other explore plant-based cooking. We began to meet once each season for a potluck to share our culinary creations and talk about food.

When we gathered our recipes on a homemade website (mindfulcooking.org), we were found by people all over this country and beyond, and we now have a mailing list of 125 caring cooks in eleven countries. We're all in different places on the carnivore-herbivore continuum. The consistent vegans among us are living proof that consumption of animal products is not needed for health or happiness; the rest of us are doing this part-time, discovering the deliciousness and boundless variety of plant-based cooking to whatever extent is right for each of us.

Global warming is still hard to face, but in an odd kind of way, I'm feeling gratitude for what it has done to my life. Looking back, I see that the climate crisis has led me to new sources of happiness. I'm enjoying so many new flavors at the dinner table. I have new friends around me and pen pals in other states and countries; they expand my horizons as they send news of food-related projects going on everywhere. I have come to realize that my small efforts are part of something much bigger, a web of connections and inspiration that's changing the food picture in many ways. I'm beginning to see global warming as a mindfulness bell, waking up people everywhere and bringing us together with a new sense of community and a growing awareness of what we are doing on this precious plane.

As I sit down to my plant-based dinner, I'm remembering John Robbins' simple prayer: May all be fed. May all be healed. May all be loved. I could add: May we do right by the Earth. 

*Eve Heidtmann,
Natural Outreach
of the Heart, is
a member of the
Thursday Night
Sangha in Portland,
Oregon.*



photo courtesy of monastic Sangha

Joyfully Together in Viet Nam

In Spring 2015, we will offer mobile retreats for small groups of mindfulness practitioners in Viet Nam. Travel from Saigon in the south, to Hue and Hoi An in the center, to Hanoi and Yen Tu Mountain in the north. Experience the homeland of our teacher and discover the roots of Vietnamese Buddhism. Leaders: Dharmacharya Trish Thompson (Chan An Dinh) and Zen Chaplain Michael Melancon (Chan Niem Quang). Email: trish_tour_vietnam@me.com.

Mindfulness Retreat in South Africa

Join us in April 2015 for a mindfulness retreat in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh at the Khula Dhamma Retreat Centre and Eco Farm (www.khuladhamma.org) in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Along with the meditation centre, we are creating a permaculture-based food forest to feed our community and visitors. We have built thatched guest huts from wattle and daub and have renovated the dairy into a lovely big meditation hall, equipped with mats and cushions and a lovely view! To find out more about this April retreat, contact Tim Wigley and Anne Keating at wildgoose@keimouth.co.za or telephone 27 (0)721 428 587 or 27 (0)832 874 308.

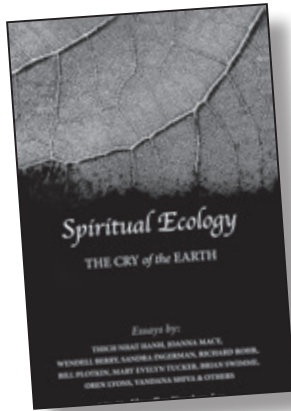
2015 Teaching Tour in Japan

We would like to invite you to join Thay and the Plum Village monastics on the teaching tour to Japan. This is an opportunity for us to contribute in introducing Plum Village to the Japanese people. Your presence as part of a Plum Village delegation supports the practice of new Japanese practitioners and helps them see that people all over the world are embracing the practice of mindfulness.

The tour will take place from April 28 to May 13, 2015, and will include:

- Five-day family retreat at the foot of Mt. Fuji
- Public talk in Tokyo
- Day of Mindfulness for businesspeople at Zojoji Temple in Tokyo
- Day of Mindfulness for health care professionals at St. Luke's Hospital

The tour will also include sightseeing trips to Kyoto, Kamakura, Yokohama, and Mt. Fuji. For more information and registration, please contact Sister Tue Nghiem: tnhasiatour@gmail.com.



Spiritual Ecology

The Cry of the Earth

Edited by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee
Golden Sufi Center, 2013
Softcover, 264 pages

Reviewed by Jayna Gieber,
*True Recollection of the
Mindfulness Trainings*

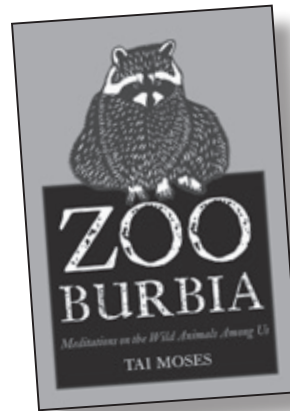
In *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee proposes that we are facing ecological and spiritual crises caused by our forgetfulness of creation's sacred nature. "Do we feel a part of this beautiful and suffering planet, do we sense its need? The connection is a living stream that flows from our heart, embracing all life.... Every step, every touch... a prayer for the Earth, a remembrance of what is sacred."

This anthology is a transmission of diverse perspectives—from indigenous visionaries, Buddhist scholars, and Christian mystics to scientific theorists. The reader is taken on a journey of oneness with all, including planet Earth. Teachings from around the world—Shamanic healing, Zen meditation, the Cosmic Christ, plus Persian and Hindu planetary cosmologies—inform us of ways to wake up and take right action now.

Many of the points regarding climate change are not new. However, I welcomed a fresh addressing of how to deal with the gravity of our times, not just through science but through eyes of compassion empowered by love, faith, and determination—so we can "dream a new dream...holding a good vision no matter what we see happening in the world."

Spiritual Ecology looks to wisdom elders. Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh offers, "What we most need to do is to hear within us the sound of the Earth crying." Eco-spiritual activist, Joanna Macy, suggests opening to grief and despair over the climate crisis our planet and all species face. She cautions humans to avoid what appears to be apathy but is actually fear of suffering: "The *bodhisattva* knows if you're afraid to get close to the pain of our world you'll be banished from its joy as well." Throughout the book we are counseled to behold the beauty of this world and the horror, while looking to a future that embraces the innocence and wonder of children. As a new grandmother, I was moved by wilderness guide Bill Plotkin's poignant words, "Caring for the soul of children is one of the keystones of responding, in both a practical and spiritual way, to our current ecological crisis."

This book stirs the heart, charges the spirit, and inspires motivation to protect all life and the Earth from a place of deep love. Guided by that love, we can weave a prayer basket, one that embraces both the scientific and spiritual dimensions of life, as the way to heal ourselves and the world. 🌱



Zooburbia

*Meditations on the Wild
Animals Among Us*

By Tai Moses
Parallax Press, 2013
Softcover, 128 pages

Reviewed by Sandra Diaz

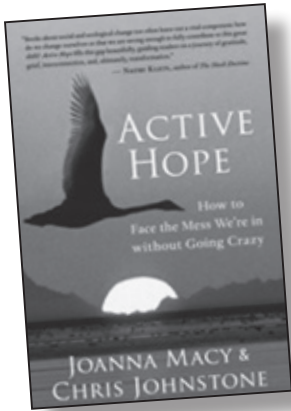
Part memoir, part urban field guide, *Zooburbia* is a sweet and humorous dive into Tai Moses' worldview, in which animals take center stage. Moses describes Zooburbia as "the extraordinary, unruly, half-wild realm where humans and animal lives overlap." It is apparent she feels at home in this world.

As a youth, Moses longed to leave her smog-covered city of Los Angeles in search of wilder landscapes. Only when she returned to a different city did she discover that an urban environment can and should hold space for wildlife. Looking deeply, Moses saw that her home was located in an important urban wildlife corridor. Inspired, she transformed her backyard from a food garden into a place where she could "help support my wild neighbors by cultivating the habitat they needed to survive."

Her musings bubble up through a Zen Buddhist framework. Moses writes, "Observing these wild creatures has helped me to cultivate the habit of mindful attention." Her conditions for happiness include "the hawk, the wild turkey, the monarch butterfly." At the same time, she admits to being a daydreamer and goes on to chronicle one of her most dramatic calls to mindfulness—being butted by a bull. Her humorous account of that story ends with a renewed call to mindfulness: "The bull had shaken and awakened me into a heightened state of awareness and it felt...wonderful."

Powerful life lessons are peppered throughout. Moses' relationship with an octopus in a pet store becomes a lesson about love and understanding; her fear of spiders turns into a meditation on equanimity; the witnessing of animal suffering becomes a clarion call to compassion. The author weaves in stories of others who inspire her (and us in the process) with their capacity for caring. She tells of a friend who is able to view the owner of a chained dog with compassion, develops a relationship with the owner, and ultimately inspires the whole neighborhood to watch over the dog as their own. In another story she recounts how her schoolteacher took in a cat that jumped through a school window; it became a well-loved school pet.

Even Moses' footnotes are engaging, whether they are offering educational resources on issues impacting animals or providing interesting facts. If you're inspired by animals as esteemed teachers, you will greatly enjoy *Zooburbia*. 🌱



Active Hope

How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy

By Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone

New World Library, 2012

Paperback, 288 pages

Reviewed by Laura Hunter,
True Ocean of Teachings

If you have ever despaired about our current condition, grieved about the looming losses on our planet, or worried about future generations, then you're in luck—*Active Hope* is just the medicine you need! This book provides a relevant, practical way forward for all of us who care about our planet. "Active hope" is not the "wishful thinking" hope that looks for someone else to save the day. Instead, it "involves identifying the outcomes we hope for and then playing an active role in bringing them about."

Active Hope provides strategies we can use to take in the beauty of the world and then face its suffering without being overwhelmed. There are chapters on how to cultivate active hope, see reality with new eyes, build support for the work we

do, maintain our energy, and protect our spirits. Importantly, it offers us a way to know how to continue to act in the face of uncertainty and non-knowing. For me, it was only after reading *Active Hope* that I was comfortable with not knowing the outcomes. In fact, even though I will never know, I can continue with joy and commitment. The book offers many concrete practices that can be done alone, with a partner, or with a group, to help us ground ourselves and act on the best of our aspirations for society and the world. The practices of asking, "What is happening through me?" and of creating a "Support Map" helped me realize how many people were there to encourage me, and to be encouraged by me, on this path.

Active Hope also explains the 1,200-year-old Shambhala Warrior Prophecy. This Tibetan Buddhist prophecy speaks of a time to come when all life on Earth is in danger. Shambhala Warriors emerge to change destructive ways using deep compassion and the insight of "radical interdependence." The book also invites us to look deeply into the nature of hierarchical power and explore new ways to build power and influence that work *with* people and not *over* them.

Nelson Mandela said, "It always seems impossible, until it is done." It may seem impossible to improve our situation, but by cultivating active hope, community, and a new vision, we might just turn the wheel enough to move the world in a more promising direction. 🌱

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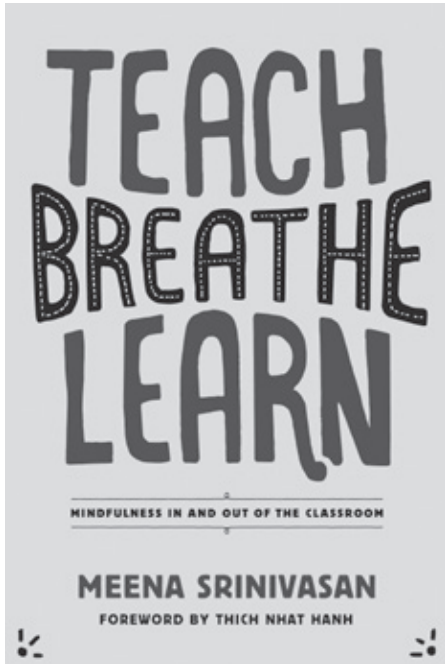
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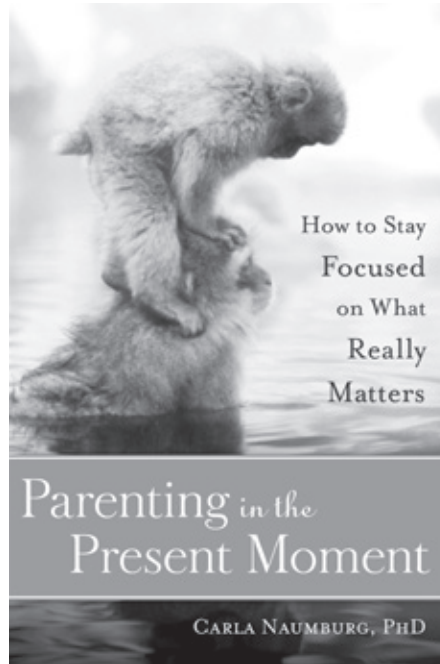
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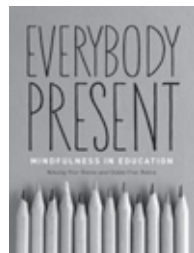
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